



# Continuities of Change: Conversion and Convertibility in Northern Mozambique

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Continuities of Change: Conversion and Convertibility in Northern Mozambique

A dissertation presented

by

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to

The Ad Hoc Committee in Religion and Anthropology

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Abstract

Recent scholarship on Africa gives the impression of a singular narrative regarding Pentecostalism, that of inexorable rise. Indisputably, Pentecostalism's "explosion" throughout the global South is one of today's more remarkable religious phenomena. Yet what can we learn by shifting attention from the places where Pentecostal churches succeed to where they fail? Attending to this question offers an opportunity to reassess a regnant theoretical paradigm within recent studies of Pentecostalism: that of discontinuity. This paradigm holds that Pentecostalism, by insisting that worshippers break with traditional practices and ancestral spirits, introduces a temporal rupture with the past. This is a salutary theoretical move, insofar as it challenges the social scientific tendency to see people as largely reproductive of the past, incapable of discontinuous change. The problem, however, is the implicit assumption that "traditional" cultures—Pentecostalism's contrast class—are static by comparison. My research reveals that the Makhuwa-speaking people of northern Mozambique prove themselves extraordinarily capable of change, and not solely as the result of conversion to Pentecostalism, migration to cities, or other features of African "modernization."

This dissertation describes Makhuwa rituals, metaphors, and histories that inculcate dispositions toward mobility and experimentalism. What is significant about these types of change is their banality in everyday affairs. As such, they help mark the Makhuwa "traditional" framework as constitutionally pliable and malleable. Change, even radical change, is

endogenous. The new churches' ecstatic dances and spirit baptisms, their theologies of rebirth and renewal, are some of the features that most appeal to those who participate in them. Their appeal, however, is as extensions of, not alternatives to, indigenous ways of being.

Yet if the convertibility of the Makhuwa self precedes entry into the churches, brings people into the churches, and finds reinforcement in the churches, it also facilitates exit from the churches. Change is not only incremental and regular, it is also reversible. The reason the churches fail to retain members is not, as their leaders often complain, that people are too rooted in their ancestral ways, but precisely the opposite: they are un-rooted, mobile *by tradition*.

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## **PREFACE**

### **An Inauguration**

I arrived at Mutúali's compound and ducked into the mud-plaster longhouse he had built soon after the rains ceased. It was dark except for light from the setting sun passing through the rear and side passageways; it was empty except for Mutúali and his friend Leonardo standing towards the front. Before them, on a specially constructed bamboo rack, sat the third television set to appear in Kaveya village. It was a 14-inch Sharp Multisystem TV, purchased 200 miles away in the capital of this northern Mozambican province. To help repay the loan that made the purchase possible, Mutúali told me he would charge an entrance fee of three meticaïs (around 10 US cents) per night. Of course, not every night would he be able to show a video and take in that revenue. "Depends on the gasoline," he said. The fee would also serve to cover this: the cost of diesel to power his electric generator and the labor of biking, jerrycans affixed to the frame, to and from the fueling station 25 miles away.

For this inaugural night Mutúali wanted me and the dozen or so others who worshipped at Kaveya village's Pentecostal church to come early. I arrived with Jemusse, who held a low-level leadership position in the church and on whose compound my wife and I were living that year. We greeted Mutúali and Leonardo, then sat down in the first of 15 rows: wooden logs upheld by short pegs. Our legs fully extended before us, nearly parallel with the dirt floor, we silently and admiringly watched Mutúali and Leonardo continue working their way through a bevy of wires and devices.

Other church members trickled in. When the deacon did too technical preparations ceased. Or, rather, they took a different form. We stood and turned to prayer. Jemusse started it

off by recalling Mutáli's previous failed projects—a dilapidated sewing machine, a motorcycle damaged beyond repair—yet affirming that God was behind those opportunities just as God is now behind this one. “Bless us God, so that all the machines work well, including the *video*,” he said. When he finished, each of us then simultaneously voiced our own versions of this prayer. Our eyes were shut and our voices loud. A few arms were raised, others punched the air. Men ambulated in small circles, women stomped the bare ground with their bare feet. After a few minutes the deacon raised his voice above the rest to bring the prayer session to a close:

We thank you, God, for the miracles you are doing in this home. Here on earth no one can do these miracles. Thank you, Lord! But whoever wants to spoil this place, stay away. These evil spirits: you cannot come near this home! Let Jesus Christ reign. Lord God, allow your child to live in peace with his children. With this, I hand over all to you, my God.

We all yelled out, “Amen!”

I reclaimed my seat and Mutáli and Leonardo returned to the final stages of setup. Out of some foam casing they removed a brand new DVD player. They connected it to an extension cord and snaked the cord through bamboo poles overhead, then out the side passageway. There the generator sat, whirring hesitantly, then more persistently. It was soon emitting the pungent odor of burning fuel.

Meanwhile the rows behind me were filling. Yet there was barely a murmur, everyone anticipating with awe the novelty before them. Someone finally broke the silence with a joke, telling us to look and see that the television is already on. He pointed to the screen, whose glass reflected, through the rear passageway, the open sky and Mutáli's mango tree, under which some children could be seen playing.

Those children rushed in when, finally, a test bulb flickered on. The television screen lit up and the word SHARP appeared as if to signal the substitution underway: electronic pixels

colored bright blue displacing the faint blue reflection of the evening sky. Cheers erupted, and both children and adults jockeyed to see around Leonardo toggling the DVD player controls. He then stepped back, a well-earned smile on his face. The show was underway. Urban Afro-pop beats resounded from the speakers, and all eyes fixed on Mr. Ong'eng'o. The Gusii words sung by him and his colorfully dressed female entourage were unintelligible to us. But the images and sounds were truly electrifying.

The bass lines thumped so intensely they drowned out the equally lively beats that would emanate later that night from a different corner of Kaveya. Summoning villagers to an all-night *mirusi* ceremony, these rhythms were amplified not by sleek new speakers but by the goat hide of hand drums, their source of power not diesel but deities. These deities were the ancestral spirits integral to all healing ceremonies, the same spirits the Pentecostal deacon had just called evil and banished from Kaveya's newest institution.

The drums beating in the distance presented me with a dilemma. I wanted to go there, one of my first opportunities to witness this traditional healing ritual, but I worried over how I could be present for both it and this important event in the life of my Pentecostal friends. A half hour into the music videos, I reluctantly rose to bid farewell, apologizing for having to leave early. No one saw the need for apologies. Although they were not planning to attend the ceremony—Pentecostal teachings explicitly bar it—they respected my desire to go. In fact, I had only learned about it, earlier that day, from Jemusse. Leonardo, indefatigable in his offers of research assistance, even promised to join me later in the night, once his technological assistance at the cinema was no longer needed.

I thanked him, bid farewell to my friends, and began the approximately ten minute walk down the dusty laterite road. In the darkness of what was now night I made out profiles of

children and adolescents sharing the road with me. As we crossed, we exchanged greetings—*Munetta phama?* Are you walking well?

I recognized my destination when five or six fire pits came into view, all on a single compound where ordinarily just one burns through the night. Around each fire were clusters of people seated on the ground or on logs, their hands alternately extending toward the flame and tearing balls of porridge paste from a common tin plate. I did not know everyone but I was welcomed to sit anyway and partake in their meal. Later I would learn that some of those present had at some previous point been involved with the Pentecostal church.

The young people present, upon finishing their meals, got up and left. Seeing them walk in the direction of Mutáli's compound, whose music was faintly audible even from where we were, I realized that those whose paths I had earlier crossed were actually making the exact opposite commute from my own. They were not just heading to the cinema, they were leaving the *mirusi* grounds to do so. I pondered the significance of this. Perhaps it was a harbinger of things to come: the inexorable entrée of modernity, with more and more people opting for transnational pop music over ancestral healing ceremonies. The short journey from the ritual grounds to the cinema seemed to represent a passage from "tradition" to "modernity." The only one swimming upstream was the anthropologist.

In short order the ceremony began. The women made their way into the healing hut, but they scarcely remained there. At various points through the night, they exited single-file, singing in call-and-response style such lyrics as: "Let's go to the mountain, seek out firewood to heat up the pot," "Let's seek the *naruru*, the medicine from the bush," and "I am returning to where I had gone to take the *nihiro* bath." Each object named revealed something significant about the ritual. The firewood was used to heat the concoction of herbs, roots, and gazelle blood that the afflicted

victim would ingest throughout the night. The water strider (*nararu*), known to zip at high velocities and in divergent directions—like the victim beset by vertigo and disequilibrium—would be captured at the river and brought into contact with the victim, then released to take her malady back to the bush and thereby restore her to a more ordered manner of movement. The *nihiro* is a purification bath at the river just before sunrise; with it, the healer told me, “the afflicted person moves from the old environment, where she was sick, to a new life.” Transformation, in all of these cases, is predicated on motion: from inside to outside, from land to river, from village to bush. Yet there was always, also, a return. Circularity—egress followed by regress—was continually and rhythmically performed, both guarantor and sign of wellbeing.

In so many obvious ways the *mirusi* ceremony differed from what was transpiring just up the road at Mutúali’s new cinema. One event was retrospective, done because “this is how our ancestors did it”; the other was prospective, gesturing toward electronic futures from which ancestral spirits were explicitly, prayerfully, expelled.

Yet there also were similarities. As central as motion was to the healing ceremony, the same could be said about the *motion* pictures—significantly, of dancers—on display at the cinema. Additionally, both events summoned powerful forces—whether ancestral spirits or the Holy Spirit, whether bush agents or pop stars—from other worlds. And they both involved a degree of discontinuity—whether from an afflicted to a healthy condition or a “traditional” to a “modern” one. Two seemingly disparate events were connected by movement: the past and present conjoined in a highly mobile present.

The mobility of the present was captured best by the children whose paths I had crossed while walking to the ritual ground. It turned out that I was to see them again that night when they returned and rejoined their mothers. Upon arrival, they built their own fire pits—variously

attending to the ritual and, in quieter hours, entertaining themselves with riddles. It struck me as I observed their effortless inhabitation of disparate worlds that although radical changes were underway, such changes were not irreversible. There was, it seemed, a bi-directionality to the path to modernity.

I saw it not just in the ease of the children's movements but in the fact that many of the women participating in the healing ceremony had been, and would likely have occasion again to be, involved with the Pentecostal church. I saw it in the good cheer with which my Pentecostal friends wished me off to the formally prohibited ceremony. I saw it in Leonardo's enthusiasm to aid my introduction to it (he kept his promise and arrived well before midnight), and in his continual affirmations of its power and significance.

All this made me rethink the one-or-another conundrum that had stressed me earlier in the day: "How would I be able to attend both the cinema's inauguration and the healing ceremony? What terrible luck that both happened to fall on the same night!"

I now came to wonder whether the sense of this as a dilemma was uniquely mine.

## INTRODUCTION

### Beyond Pentecostal Explosion

This is a dissertation about change, about how it is conceived and experienced, received and initiated. Dominant intellectual discourses, under the influence of Michel Foucault (1972) for whom the history of ideas is a series of epistemic ruptures, have come to present historical change in terms of discontinuous epochs. Attending this is usually a strong sense of the exceptional nature of the present, its radical alterity from the period just past. Hence, the present world, the one we are *all* said to occupy, is that of the post-: postmodern, postcolonial, postsecular. Most germane to the narrative told in the preface is the designation “postelectronic” (Appadurai 1996: 5), a radically new world in which even remote corners can connect to far off places through time- and space-compressing technologies. Of course there are exceptions: as late as the years of my fieldwork—2011-2012—no cell phone signals reached Kaveya village and electric power in the entire district was confined to a one-mile radius in the heart of the district capital. Yet plans for constructing two cell phone towers deep into the countryside were underway and, as evidenced by developments on Mutáli’s compound, living far off the electric grid could not stop resourceful villagers from finding ways to broadcast hitherto unfathomed music styles and introduce hitherto unimagined lifestyles. Mr. Ong’eng’o of Kenya was just a hint of things to come. On future visits to the cinema I encountered packed audiences enjoying videos from as far away as Nigeria and Hollywood. Especially popular among the latter was “Undisputed II: Last Man Standing,” promoted on the DVD cover as “Intensive! Explosive! Mind Blowing!” Unprecedented changes underway, indeed—or so it would seem.

## Rupture

There is indisputable value in seeing oft-overlooked African locales as developing in these ways. Anthropologists throughout most of the discipline's history tended to view with anxiety the entrée of its "noble savages" into modernity. Fieldworkers rushed in to "traditional" societies to "salvage" the folkways and narratives of their inhabitants before the forces of globalization could get to them and render them extinct (Gruber 1970). Well intentioned though they were, such anxieties also expressed a measure of ignorance as to the fact that people have never lived in vacuums (Appadurai 1988). Cultures have always been dynamic and interactive, adapting to and critically negotiating every encounter, including with such seemingly predatory forces as colonialism, capitalism, and Christianity (Rosaldo 1993; Comaroff and Comaroff 1991, 1997).

An anthropological alternative to the caricature of vulnerable natives powerless before homogenizing forces arose in the late twentieth century along with similar developments in postcolonial theory—particularly Homi Bhabha's (1994) concept of hybridity. The argument here is that whatever the universalizing rhetoric of its agents, no culture and no religion, however expansive, has ever succeeded in taking similar form in dissimilar contexts. In missionary encounters of southern Africa, for example, local populations related to Christianity not as converts in the Pauline sense of total transformation but as "bricoleurs of the spiritual" engaged in a "complex dialectic of invasion and riposte, of challenge and resistance" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 250). The *locus classicus* of such dynamics is the Afro-Atlantic, where slaves forced to adopt Christianity stealthily hid their African deities behind Catholic saints, effectively preserving their religious past against tremendous pressures to erase it (Bastide 1978, Apter 2005). Whether called hybridity or syncretism, localization or indigenization, this literature



argues persuasively that people do not passively accept the new, but creatively appropriate and localize it in accord with underlying cultural or religious logics.<sup>1</sup>

Arjun Appadurai's *Modernity at Large* (1996) helped mark another theoretical shift, not by denying processes of hybridization and mixture but by radicalizing the possibilities of change. Due not only to increasingly widespread electronic media but also to significantly more opportunities for long-distance migration, a wider set of possible lives has become imaginable and manageable for a larger number of people than before. In this scenario it is not just that people appropriate the new in terms of the old. Rather, media and migratory flows make it increasingly viable for just about anyone to transcend his or her place of origins. Consequently, and in language reminiscent of Foucault, "the world in which we now live... involve[s] a general break with all sorts of pasts" (Appadurai 1996: 2-3).

Nothing better illustrates the theoretical shift from hybridity to rupture than the *oeuvre* of Charles Piot. In *Remotely Global*, Piot (1999) argues compellingly against the tendency to see remote African villages, such as those in Togo where he conducted research, as untouched by global processes of interaction and exchange. One decade later, in *Nostalgia for the Future* (2010), Piot claims to stand by those earlier insights, their disruption of "epistemological divides between modernity and tradition, global and local, core and periphery" (Piot 2010: 8). However, the premise of his second book is that something dramatic has changed, something epoch-defining in fact: namely, the end of the Cold War. With it, the United States and the Soviet

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<sup>1</sup> Whether such localizations transpire from the top-down or bottom-up is a question that has spurred a range of responses. Lamin Sanneh (1989) attributes the vernacularization of Christianity primarily to the initiative of missionaries concerned to express Christian truths in vernacular terms. By contrast, and more persuasively, Birgit Meyer has written of syncretisms or Africanizations "from below," in which "indigenous interpretations are not *given* by the mission, but *made* by converts themselves in a process of appropriation (often against the meanings missionaries intended to evoke)" (Meyer 1994: 61).

Union ceased financing dictatorial regimes and local chieftancies in Togo and elsewhere, thus eviscerating resources that had propped up such authorities since the time of independence. These radically new sovereignties have generated radically new temporalities and subjectivities.

Piot recognizes arguments against seeing history in terms of such momentous breaks. Yet “[d]espite the continued presence of... hybridities—of the cultural mixing that is emblematic of the postcolonial moment and celebrated by postcolonial theory—this is nevertheless a world that has turned a new page” (Piot 2010: 14). Quotidian concerns have been reoriented from untoward pasts—manifest in the decline of village traditions—to indeterminate futures—manifest in the growing desire for travel visas. Figuring most prominently in this reorientation is the rise and spread of Pentecostal religiosity. Through its demonizing of “tradition” and messianic expectations for the future, it illustrates on its own just how new is the page that has been turned (Piot 2010: 53-76).

In a different part of West Africa, Ruth Marshall similarly documents the potency of Pentecostal projects of radical renewal. She describes it in terms of Hannah Arendt’s principle of natality, the capacity of human action to initiate new beginnings, to be “born again” (Marshall 2009: 3; Arendt 1971: 247). Marshall positions her project against what she calls anthropology’s “domestication of modernity” approach, which “depends on tracing, not the ruptures that ‘conversion to modernity’ brings about, but rather the lines of cultural and historical continuity” (Marshall 2009: 6). Yet her critique of anthropology may be overdrawn, since, as seen, increasingly many anthropologists do privilege rupture over hybridity.

Moreover, it is within (though also against) the anthropological discipline that the anthropology of Christianity has arisen; and it is within this subfield that the trope of rupture most thrives. Most of its studies of conversion (see Robbins 2010a: 158-163) reference Birgit

Meyer's essay, "'Make a Complete Break with the Past': Memory and Postcolonial Modernity in Ghanaian Pentecostal Discourse" (1998). In the case Meyer describes, to break with one's past means to sever ties with kin and to cease performing ancestral rituals. The global reach of this Pentecostal injunction has generated a decade's worth of ethnographic attention to and anthropological theorizing of contemporary Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity (Meyer 1998, 1999; Engelke 2004, 2010; Robbins 2003, 2007).

Joel Robbins not only documents empirical evidence of Pentecostal projects of discontinuity, he makes of it a critique of his discipline. Anthropology is biased toward continuity, he argues, wedded to a view that "culture comes from yesterday, is reproduced today, and shapes tomorrow" (Robbins 2007: 10). Robbins contends that Pentecostalism's discourse of disjuncture and ritualization of rupture compel a re-theorizing of how people relate the new to the old. Pentecostalism uniquely refuses capture by anthropological models of hybridization and localization. It does, in fact, demand discontinuity.

There is much to commend in the theoretical shift from hybridity to rupture. With regard to Pentecostals, first of all, it takes practitioners at their word. Many Pentecostals do claim to be making a "break with the past." The prayers offered to help inaugurate Mutáli's new cinema are a clear example, evidence that his entrepreneurial project is inseparable from an ethical project, one of recreating the self in particular ways. Moreover, it is significant that the newest cinema of Kaveya village appeared on the compound of a member of Kaveya's Pentecostal church. In the pleas for protection from evil spirits, the rupturing dynamics Appadurai associates with the proliferation of mass media converged with the rupturing dynamics Piot, Marshall, and Robbins associate with the proliferation of Pentecostalism. Finally, anthropological models that reduce people to one or another cultural matrix, whether by freezing them in the ethnographic present

(Fabian 1983) or theorizing their embrace of the new necessarily in terms of the old, do indeed perpetuate a pernicious notion that certain people, usually labeled “traditional,” are prone only to reproducing their past, that they are incapable of radical change, of beginning things anew. As argued in an essay reviewing the anthropology of Christianity, scholars who take such a stance tread perilously close to “suggest[ing] that people are incapable of ever learning anything new” (Bialecki et al. 2008: 1145).

Efforts to avoid such perils must be applauded. It would be the height of ethnocentric arrogance to deny people capabilities most westerners assume for themselves—of transcending their formative contexts, of breaking with the past, of taking on the new. But what is implied in the association of these capacities with Pentecostalism, electronic media, travel visas, and the like? Renewal certainly may be occasioned by these and other aspects of the modernity now said to be “at large” (Appadurai 1996). But does it require them?

The argument of this dissertation is that, while the recent theoretical turn toward rupture merits praise for challenging the view of people as bound to the past, it replicates the problem it seeks to solve by implying that, among certain people—among certain cultural Others—there is something radically new about radical renewal. Among the Makhuwa-speaking people of northern Mozambique, experiences of migration, models of change, and rituals of transformation are not new. Indeed, they are what prefigure and inform engagements with the new by inculcating bodily dispositions toward mobility and mutability, experimentalism and eclecticism.<sup>2</sup> What is significant about these types of changes is their banality in everyday

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<sup>2</sup> Highlighting indigenous models of change need not be seen as a return to the hybridity model or to anthropology’s continuity bias, but an appreciation that change (conversion, migration, transformation) has particular and often pregnant meanings in “traditional” societies. It is an approach that asks not only what Christianity does to local cultures, but what local ways of knowing and being do to Christianity. Examples of how indigenous models of

affairs. As such, they help mark the Makhuwa “traditional” framework as constitutionally pliable and malleable, thereby reducing the distance between routine movements within it and exceptional movements about it. Change, even radical and rupturing change, is endogenous.

I hasten to clarify that it is never explicitly asserted by theorists of rupture that people outside the sphere of “modernity” are incapable of engaging in projects of discontinuity. However, this is precisely what is suggested by the exceptional status granted to such novelties as long-distance migration and Pentecostal conversion. This dissertation can be read as an effort to render rupture less exceptional, to render Pentecostal conversion, at least in the Makhuwa case, a banal extension of an already convertible way of being.

Before developing that argument, the remainder of this introduction sets the scene of my fieldwork and the research problem I took to it. I narrate how I came to arrive in the rural district of Maúa after having my originally conceived project upended. It was to be on the confluence of urbanization and Pentecostalization trends in contemporary Mozambique. Much can be learned by comparing these two seemingly “modern” conditions of contemporary Africa. However, to appreciate what Pentecostal conversions share in common with urban migrations requires turning attention from such graspable entities as churches and cities to the indeterminate individuals who often relate passingly and partially to them. Converts’ and migrants’ fluid involvements with “modernity” refute teleological assumptions about its inevitability.

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change inform Christian conversion can be found in Horton 1971, Cucchiari 1988, Rutherford 2006, and Vilaça and Wright 2009.

## **The Pentecostalization Thesis**

Perhaps the most potent force behind the theoretical turn toward rupture is the demographic fact of Pentecostalism's tremendous worldwide rise (Johnson 2013). Not since the once commonplace but now discredited assumptions of religion's decline—one aspect of the so-called secularization thesis—has the inexorability of any phenomenon so captured the attention of religion scholars. One might speak of a Pentecostalization thesis. Few studies addressing Pentecostalism begin without asserting or assuming this tradition's "explosive" growth.<sup>3</sup> Robert Hefner summarizes the prevailing scholarly consensus in the first sentence of only one of the more recent books promoted as a state-of-the-field overview: "It is by now a commonplace in sociology, anthropology, and comparative religious studies that Pentecostalism is the fastest growing religious movement in the contemporary world" (Hefner 2013: 1). So lofty a claim, it turns out, can be topped, and has been by none other than Peter Berger: "In all likelihood," he writes, "Pentecostalism is the fastest-growing movement in history" (Berger 2012: 46).

The Pentecostalization thesis takes discipline-specific shape. In the sociology of religion, once prime purveyor of the secularization thesis, arguments about the "resurgence of religion" in public life (Casanova 1994, Hefner 1998) often list Pentecostal Christianity alongside reformist Islam as the main reasons for secularization's non-credibility today. In religious studies, what scholars of world Christianity refer to as the southward shift in Christianity's center of gravity illustrates that, if it once made sense to consider Christianity a Western religion, contemporary developments make a compelling case for Christianity being now decidedly non-western (Sanneh 2008). This owes especially to the growth of Pentecostalism in the global South

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<sup>3</sup> The violence of this metaphor, perhaps not coincidentally, seems to correlate with the equally shattering images of "break" and "rupture" often used to describe religious conversion. Linda Van de Kamp takes Pentecostal violence as a central theme in her study of Mozambican Pentecostalism (van de Kamp 2011: 23-25).

(Jenkins 2002). Anthropologists of Christianity note that their discipline's historical neglect of Christianity as an object of ethnographic inquiry ceased to be excusable for the simple empirical fact of "the tremendous expansion of Christianity in sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and Oceania" (Bialecki et al. 2008: 1141), i.e., in those places anthropologists have traditionally gone for fieldwork.

After years with little more than the Pentecostalization thesis to prepare me, I arrived in the city of Lichinga, capital of Mozambique's northern province of Niassa, in 2011. I knew what I would be finding, the only task being to come up with some original analysis of it.

I did not find it.

Not in Niassa province, at least. To be sure, Pentecostal ministries have proliferated throughout Mozambique (Cruz e Silva 2001, van de Kamp 2011, Pfeiffer 2005, Schuetze 2010), including in the less historically Christian, more Islamic north (Kantel 2007, Morier-Genoud 2000, Brown 2011), and Niassa's capital city of Lichinga is not without a Pentecostal presence. The most numerous, visible, and well-known among Lichinga's churches is the Brazil-based Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (*Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus*, hereafter IURD). As many as 15 branches had opened in the ten years prior to my arrival: evidence, indeed, of Pentecostalism's "explosion." Yet in that same time span, as many as three of those branches had folded; others had moved into smaller buildings. This information I was freely given by IURD pastors themselves, people who would be more prone to overstating than understating the success of their evangelistic efforts.

Perhaps the most graphic illustration of local inhabitants' tepid response to Pentecostalism was written on the cracked, whitewashed walls of a two-story building across

from Lichinga's municipal prison. During the time of my fieldwork, the building served as a storage and operations facility for Humana People to People. A banner displaying this international nongovernmental organization's Portuguese acronym and tagline occupied the top right corner of the exterior wall. However, in faded yellow letters which the banner only partially covered appeared the faintly visible words, "*Jesus Cristo é o Senhor*" (Jesus Christ is the Lord): the slogan affixed to IURD buildings throughout the world. The narrative of Pentecostalism's boom is commonly expressed in terms of former cinemas, factories, and warehouses turned into churches. Here I encountered the reverse.

It would be wrong to generalize from this that the IURD churches in Lichinga are largely empty. Many services are reasonably well attended.<sup>4</sup> However, a closer look reveals that the attendees are primarily *vientes* (newcomers). This term refers not to Yao-, Makhuwa-, and Nyanja-speaking migrants from Niassa's countryside, recent arrivals to Lichinga in search of wage labor. It refers to formally educated entrepreneurial and government elites who relocate from the more prosperous cities of Mozambique's southern and coastal regions with employment contracts already in hand. These are people who may have already encountered Pentecostalism elsewhere, such as in the capital of Maputo where, pastors told me and scholars confirm (van de Kamp 2011: 12-13), Pentecostalism thrives. On one occasion, a worship service I attended in Lichinga included a song sung in Changana, an indigenous language of Maputo province, nowhere near Niassa. The pastor leading that service—like most IURD pastors he was also a *viente* from a southern province—preached against the demonic influence of "*curandeiros* [ritual

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<sup>4</sup> Although I did once have the bizarre experience of being one of two people attending a Saturday noon service at the IURD's central church in Lichinga. Granted, it was not a Sunday service which draws more people, but still, it felt somehow significant that there were only two of us in a former cinema that can seat well over 300. Nevertheless, the conductor of the service walked in promptly at noon, asked the two of us to stand, and proceeded to yell his prayers in the commanding voice of Pentecostal preachers toward the back of the hall, even though both of us were up front.



healers], false prophets, and *mazione*,” the latter word referring to Zionist prophets who are ubiquitous in southern Mozambique but scarce in the north. The preacher was clearly contextualizing his demonology (Hackett 2003), though not in response to the social and religious reality surrounding his church but to the population of *vientes* within it. When I asked the pastor of one branch to estimate the percentage of regular worshippers who are from Niassa, he admitted it is no more than three percent. In Lichinga’s peripheral shantytowns where labor migrants live “it is sometimes hard to get 15 people inside the church, even on Sunday,” another pastor told me. Suggested in all this is that if the local population has not turned *en masse* to Pentecostalism, the reason cannot be that Pentecostal churches have not yet arrived; they *have* arrived and yet the local population responds ambivalently. These observations reveal that the Pentecostalization of African populations can be seen as neither a *fait accompli* nor an historical inevitability. At least in Niassa province new Pentecostal churches, despite being present, have not always been embraced.

In what manner, then, do people relate to the new churches? This is the central question of this dissertation and will be addressed throughout it. For now, it should be noted that in Lichinga and other more urban settings of northern Mozambique, many men and women do in fact attend, but too intermittently to be counted by pastors as among the faithful. They enter, receive a blessing (or not), and exit. They are not asked to introduce themselves as first-time visitors, they do not receive pastoral visits, and they remain largely anonymous (see van Wyk 2014). One person I met on the street in front of the IURD branch in Niassa’s third largest town told me that when this church first opened it attracted enormous numbers of people and remained like that for two months. Afterwards, the excitement tapered off. Most people “returned to tradition,” he told me. Five years into its existence, this church is attended mainly by the *vientes*

in town in a consistent manner and by local men and women in a periodic, one might say rotational, manner. Suggestively, the Makhuwa subgroup of the district of Marrupa is called Metto which means, literally, legs, the root of “et” expressing motion in many Bantu languages of the region.

In the scholarship on Pentecostalism there is a growing recognition of the need to attend to such places and such ways in which Pentecostalism is not an unparalleled story of success. Hefner (2013: 27) suggests that Pentecostal defection “may prove to be an important horizon of research.” Already Henri Gooren (2010: 124-125) has written on “Pentecostal disaffiliation,” Douglas Jacobsen (2011: 56) on “post-Pentecostal/Charismatic Christians,” and Paul Freston (2013) on Pentecostal decline in (of all places) Brazil. In southern Africa, David Maxwell has also raised such questions, drawing on trends of disenchantment in historical Methodism to ask, “Has the Pentecostal ‘walk-out’ begun?” (Maxwell 2006a: 390). I join this dissertation to such efforts at querying, rather than assuming, the inexorability of Pentecostal growth. My aim is not to replace the Pentecostalization thesis with an equally over-generalized thesis of Pentecostal failure. I mean not even to contest the statistical evidence that Pentecostalism is growing in many places, and growing in fact quite speedily. I wish merely to note that there is more to the story than statistics can convey.

By attending to where Pentecostalism’s reception has been lukewarm at best I aim to correct for a bias inherent in the study of Pentecostalism, or of any singular religious tradition: that of going only to where it is vibrant, where one’s research subjects are most easily identifiable and readily researchable. In his introduction to a volume of studies conducted under the auspices of the well-funded Pentecostal and Charismatic Research Initiative, project director Donald Miller acknowledges that “statistics are difficult to assess because of the somewhat

nebulous character of the renewalist movement” (Miller 2013: 9). Yet he goes on to cite a plethora of statistics backed up by two appendices of demographic survey results, all of which corroborate the volume’s back cover claim (recalling what Hefner above called “by now a commonplace”) that “Pentecostalism is the fastest growing religious movement in the world.” Elsewhere in his introduction, Miller comments on “the privilege of overseeing a large research initiative on global Pentecostalism, which has allowed me to travel to places where one might not expect to see Pentecostal churches, such as Indonesia and Russia” (Miller 2013: 4). One wonders, however, whether he in fact set out to visit places where, it happens, “one might not expect to see Pentecostal churches,” or set out to visit Pentecostal churches that he knew to expect to see, and determined (particular parts of) particular countries to travel to on that basis.<sup>5</sup>

The recent efforts of socio-cultural anthropologists to organize a research program under the label “anthropology of Christianity” further illustrates the bias. This subfield has been conceptualized as a response to anthropology’s historical neglect of Christianity as an object of inquiry.<sup>6</sup> But if scholars outside the anthropology of Christianity have tended to neglect Christianity, while those inside the anthropology of Christianity attend primarily to where Christianity is most expansive, where “members practice their faith in ways that make their commitments hard to ignore” (Bialecki et al. 2008: 1141), there is a large middle terrain almost completely unexplored. This dissertation intends to contribute to the filling of that gap by calling

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<sup>5</sup> Likewise, with respect to Africa specifically, Jacob Olupona observes how problematic can be conclusions arising from unreliable statistical claims: “A major problem for scholars doing research on the pentecostal-charismatic movement in Africa is the lack of reliable statistics to document assertions in the literature and the press that it is the fastest-growing church in West Africa” (Olupona 2002: 15).

<sup>6</sup> Numerous reasons for this neglect have been raised. They include Christians’ simultaneously insufficient and excessive alterity from the Christianized cultural contexts of western anthropologists (Robbins 2003), the political quietism if not conservatism of many of its most successful branches (Harding 1991), and anthropologists’ theoretical inability to handle projects of radical change such as that of Christian conversion (Robbins 2007).

attention to places where Pentecostalism is *not* tremendously expanding, where the presence and practices of Pentecostals are in fact marginal to such driving Euro-American academic concerns as nationalism, neoliberalism, mass media, and the “resurgence of religion” in public life. Even in places where Pentecostals are relatively easy to ignore, might there still be a story worth telling, a story in part about Pentecostalism itself?

### **Circular Migrations**

In questioning what I have called the Pentecostalization thesis, I should clarify that I do not mean to resurrect the rightfully moribund secularization thesis. This dissertation does not report any decline in the significance of religiosity in Mozambique. I call attention, rather, to the tendency of all theoretical claims about generalized conditions to presuppose one or another *telos*. By turning now to migration, considered by Appadurai (1996) and other rupture theorists to be one major indicator of the radically new epoch we live in, the inadequacy of teleological thinking comes into high relief. Not unlike the assumption that Pentecostal conversions are on the rise, the same too is often claimed about urban migrations (cf. Potts 2012: 1-3). There is no disputing the fact that most African cities are rapidly growing. Even beyond movement from countryside to cities, numerous studies point to the growing trend of transnational migrations. Piot (2010: 77-95), for example, highlights ways in which lives in post-Cold War Togo are increasingly oriented by the aspiration for visas to foreign countries. Connecting this “desire for exile” with Pentecostal conversion, Piot (2010: 77) writes, “If Charismatic Christianity represents one response to the current sovereignty crisis, playing the visa lottery is another, providing a complement to the virtual form of surrogation or exit enacted by the Pentecostal.”

But as with conversion, so too with migration there is no shortage of stories to puncture the prevailing narrative and complicate the statistical trends. Take the story of Gildon, whom I met in Niassa's rural district of Maúa, where he had grown up before pursuing secondary school in the provincial capital of Lichinga. He recalled the optimism that his teachers, including those at a Lichinga secondary school called "A Luta Continua,"<sup>7</sup> filled him with: "my teachers said about a person who studies that some will be presidents, some nurses, some teachers, some engineers." Yet when Gildon finished school at the age of 18, the economic reality of a growing African city struck its blow. He needed a job to survive, since urban survival required a cash income. But he also needed cash to get a job. He reported that public examiners demanded bribes. Being from a rural district, coming to the city without money and without connections, his education amounted to nothing. He ended up selling tomatoes at the municipal market just to make ends meet. As we talked he glanced at my motorcycle, parked beside us, and told me that there was a time he would go up to anyone wealthy enough to own a vehicle and ask them for a job. Coming up so empty, he decided simply to return home and cultivate his own crops, tomatoes included, as his parents and grandparents had done. "Between here and the city, life is a little more reasonable here," he said. "In the city you even find doctors [people with high educational credentials] without jobs who turn to crime."

Importantly, Gildon did not see his return from Lichinga as a regress to traditional subsistence living. He actually found living at a distance from big cities consistent with his hope for monetary wealth. The economic benefit is known to many who live in cities like Lichinga or towns like Maúa's district capital while maintaining a smallholder farm (Portuguese: *machamba*;

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<sup>7</sup> This phrase, meaning "the struggle continues," was the rallying cry for the anti-colonial struggle and post-independence Mozambican government.

Makhuwa: *ematta*) far from it. They find it advantageous to cultivate crops, especially cash crops like tobacco and cotton away from urban centers, not because they are detached from the cash economy of urban life but precisely the opposite. As one friend in Maúa's district capital told me, due to the lack of available land in that town of 25,000 closely concentrated inhabitants, "here people do not cultivate. There [in the countryside] people can cultivate. They can feed their families easier than we can here in town. And the products they bring here to sell, from that they have money to buy cooking oil, bicycles, all kinds of things." You can also find fresh fish in the rivers out there, he told me, whereas in town fish are only sold occasionally at market at prohibitive prices. "The deeper you go into the bush [Portuguese: *mato*; Makhuwa: *muhuru*], the better," he concluded. Returning from big cities to rural districts or from town to countryside therefore sometimes affords more economic mobility than does settling permanently in towns and cities. There, jobs either do not exist or remain out-of-reach for all but the best connected.

One can see in all of these matters a reason for why reverse migration is as much a phenomenon as migration. In his study of the once rapidly industrializing mining zone of Zambia known as the copperbelt, anthropologist James Ferguson dismantles what he calls "the myth of permanent urbanization" (Ferguson 1999: 41-43), part and parcel of mythologies of modernization. These conventional narratives refer to a teleology of "progress" and "development" in which labor migrations lead to that which western societies consider the pinnacle of civilization: the *polis* in which people settle, work, and prosper. Yet the overwhelming evidence from Zambia points to quite the opposite. On the basis of that evidence Ferguson calls readers to unlearn social scientific models adapted from the natural sciences that speak of linear progress, from one discrete evolutionary stage to another. Such teleologies of modernization have had the effect of leaving people disenchanted: "For the workers at the Nkana

mine, the breakdown of the myth of modernization was no mere academic development but a world-shattering life experience” (Ferguson 1999: 14). Evidence of this existential angst could be found in Gildon’s words to me, which told of immense sadness over his sense of failure in the big city. He had, after all, been assured by teachers that education is the key for unlocking unlimited opportunities.

Yet what might be a difference between the Zambian copperbelt and northern Mozambique is the relative pervasiveness of the narrative of modernization. Not everyone in Niassa had a chance to study in top government schools as had Gildon. Not everyone therefore had imbibed the myth of modernization. Cewalusa, for example, is one middle-aged man I met who also tried his fortune in a big city (Niassa’s second largest city of Cuamba), but returned to his *machamba* in the Maúá countryside because, rather than employment in Cuamba, there he encountered only hunger. Yet, he told me, this need to return did not bother him; it was not what Ferguson calls “a world-shattering life experience.” Lacking formal education and therefore relatively unversed in the myth of modernization, he appeared able to accept more realistically the limits of his circumstances, and therein find pockets within which to realize wellbeing. When an opportunity arose to try his fortune in the city, he went. When it did not bear fruit, he returned. Regress was as unproblematic as egress. Cewalusa’s perspective is by far the more common among the men and women I knew in Maúá district. Yet whether accompanied by despair or indifference, all these examples of reversal put the lie to unidirectional conceptions of the urbanization path.

None of this is to imply that people tend to migrate to cities, encounter frustrations, and return permanently to their homes. Return to the countryside did not preclude occasional forays back to the cities, whether to sell surplus crops, visit relatives, or seek healing in biomedical

hospitals. Better than “reverse migration,” the concept of “circular migration” (Potts 2010) points to such patterns, patterns marked by both transience and repetition. They entail not so much outward movements involving permanence, as lateral movements involving multiplicity. This multiplicity is consistent with a venerable tradition of scholarship regarding the coexistence of local and global dynamics in all spaces, whether urban or rural (Cooper 1983, Englund 2002b), not least Piot’s earlier work (1999). But it is a tradition of scholarship seriously under challenge, not least by Piot’s more recent work (2010).

Modernization narratives do not allow for oscillations and circularities. They presume a *telos*, something of a trajectory. The normative valorization of “civilizational progress” implied in traditional modernization theories is explicitly denounced by those who have more recently embraced concepts of rupture (e.g., Appadurai 2006: 9). Nevertheless, the trajectory remains. Pentecostalism, it is argued, differs from syncretic forms of religion—popular Catholicism and African initiated churches—in the same way that urbanization and transnational migration differ from nomadic and other forms of unsettled habitation. I intend this study to be an application of Ferguson’s critical revaluation of migration to the topic of conversion, to what I observed to be the ambiguities and indeterminacies of religious conversion in northern Mozambique. If migrations are non-linear, why not conversions?

### **An Existentialist Critique of the Anthropology of Christianity**

How might anthropology better account for such fissures in the narrative of unidirectional ruptures and irreversible shifts? It turns out that Piot, despite purveying this type of narrative in his most recent work, provides therein an answer. Extending his thesis that both Pentecostal



religiosity and long-distance migration independently bespeak discontinuity, Piot notes that the two phenomena even reinforce one another: “Not surprisingly, perhaps, prayer is routinely called on to enhance peoples’ [sic] chances in the [visa] lottery. Entire Lomé congregations have even been known to engage in prayer... so that members will get visas.” Yet, Piot adds, “The lottery fuels not only church attendance but also visits to spirit shrines. One selectee I know hedged his bets and did both, stepping up church attendance while also returning to the village to consult a diviner” (Piot 2010: 91). An important methodological shift has taken place from one passage to the next. It is a shift in focus: from ethnography to biography, from the general to the particular, from “entire Lomé congregations” to “one selectee.” Although his book centers on wide-scale, post-Cold War aspirations to break with such things as villages and spirit shrines, Piot in this brief but telling anecdote reveals what his theoretical model would disqualify: the circular and situational character of both migration and conversion.<sup>8</sup>

A flaw in much scholarly writing is its tendency to eclipse such variations in lived experience with over-generalized explanatory theories, conceptual schemes, and metanarratives. A limitation of cultural anthropology specifically is its tendency to reduce human behavior, thought, and action to the cultural forces that shape them and the cultural representations that express them. The critique of culturalism—the presumed determinativeness and boundedness of “culture”—was powerfully made decades ago (see, e.g., Abu-Lughod 1991, Gupta and Ferguson 1992). Yet one need look no further than the thriving anthropology of Christianity for evidence that the problem persists. Robbins (2007) contrasts this subfield with the historical anthropology of Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (1991, 1997). By focusing on the imbrications of

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<sup>8</sup> It should not surprise that Matthew Engelke’s critique of an overly exclusive focus on discontinuity in conversion studies emerges from his detailed portrait of a single man. I share his view that “the array of churches and movements” upon which scholars tend to focus attention has caused the study of African Christianity to “suffer from a lack of detailed accounts of everyday followers” (Engelke 2004: 84).

Christianity and colonial capitalism in the South African missionary encounter, the Comaroffs fail to consider the content of Christianity in this particular setting, its significance “as a system of meanings with a logic of its own” (Robbins 2007: 7; see also Cannell 2006: 11-12). Yet it is precisely Robbins’ systematic, logocentric conception of culture that anthropologists have done well to move beyond.

A logocentric thrust in the anthropology of Christianity is long-standing. Not unlike religious studies historically (cf. Vasquez 2011), the anthropology of Christianity has been driven largely by linguistic considerations—what people say and claim to believe, as well as the so-called “language ideology” identified by scholars as Christian (Bialecki et al. 2008: 1146-1147; Bialecki and Hoenes del Pinal 2011). An example of this is Robbins’ elevation of rupture as a *sine qua non* of Pentecostalism largely on the basis of claims informants make about themselves and the temporal models with which they construct and represent their conversion narratives (Robbins 2007: 10-14). While there is no disputing the need to take our informants at their word, we ought not lose sight of the limits of discourse and representation, particularly in critical situations. As Meyer (1998) makes plain in the subtitle of her groundbreaking essay, the Pentecostal claim of rupture conveyed in the phrase, “Make a complete break with the past,” is a *discursive* claim. In practice, most notable is “believers’ *inability* to make a complete break with what they conceptualize as ‘the past’” (Meyer 1998: 318; emphasis mine). Phenomenological and existential anthropology go further than any anthropological tradition toward highlighting the non-equivalence of ideology and experience. They do so by re-introducing such non-discursive features as bodily dispositions, mundane metaphors, and everyday interactions. Additional resources for this methodological move exist in phenomenological approaches more broadly, including within the comparative history of religions. I share Jacob Olupona’s appraisal

of phenomenology as perspicaciously attending to insider perspectives and experiences that cannot be reduced to verbal models. As Olupona puts it, “an overemphasis on cognition and rationality in ritual undercuts the importance of the ritual act itself to the ‘participant-insider,’ as defined within the religion” (Olupona 2011: 3).

That Robbins’ starting point is so different—more linguistic than experiential, more intellectual than corporeal, more structural than phenomenological—leads him down the path of essentialized constructions of “Christian” or “Pentecostal” culture. Positioning his work against “anthropologists today [who] commonly assert that cultures are made up of bits and pieces of varied origin,” Robbins instead insists on identifying that which uniquely characterizes Pentecostal culture (Robbins 2010a: 161-162). He ultimately settles on a negative definition—“a culture ‘against culture’” (Robbins 2010a: 159, 161) in the sense that Pentecostalism is predicated on rupture with the past—but insists nonetheless that it is meaningfully spoken of as a whole. In his rejoinder to Robbins’ critiques, John Comaroff (2010: 529) argues that by “treat[ing] the faith primarily as culture,” Robbins revives an ahistorical and immaterial (one might add disembodied) notion of culture that is better off dead. I could not agree more with Comaroff in this critique (see also Englund 2007a: 482; Hann 2007), though I do not endorse the Comaroffs’ alternative that hypostatizes abstract and anonymous forces of another type, e.g., neoliberalism, commodification, and modernity (Englund and Leach 2000: 227-230).

Against all forms of reduction and abstraction, existential anthropology intervenes by reinserting the individual and refusing to infer lived experience from identities and epochs. Comaroff (2010: 528) would call this a fetishizing of the local and a failure to deal with theory. Yet a phenomenological turn to such critical events and lived experiences need not imply a denial of either political economy or culture. It is simply a refusal to see the “macro-cosmic

forces and determinations in the world” (Comaroff 2010: 528) as so forcefully determinative that people have nothing to do but acquiesce to them. Lila Abu-Lughod’s (1991) call for “writing against culture” with “ethnographies of the particular” and Wilfred Cantwell Smith’s (1963: 119-153) focus on “religious persons” prior to “religious systems” recognize that the discursive apparatuses of the human sciences can never succeed in erasing humans.

Along with identifying and characterizing “Christian culture,” a parallel research priority in the anthropology of Christianity has been that of specifying what it means to be a “Christian self.” Anthropologists and social theorists alike have long noted the role of Christianity, particularly Protestantism, in individualizing and interiorizing subjectivity (Cannell 2006: 14-22). Among those for whom selfhood is defined relationally, conversion to Christianity entails conversion not only to a religion but to modern notions of autonomous personhood (van der Veer 1996: 9; Bialecki et al. 2008: 1147; Keane 2007). An important challenge to existential anthropology arises from this point: if Christianity is what transmits the ideology of individualism, it may be misguided, ethnocentric even, to presume individuality in the people we study.<sup>9</sup> Inquiry can legitimately attend to processes of individualization, but not to individuals.

Yet just as surely as models of unidirectional conversion and migration oversimplify, so too do trajectories of individualization and the typology they assume. Against claims anthropologists once made about the mystical participations of “primitive” people, Godfrey Lienhardt highlights the eccentricities, slips of tongue, and clever calculations at the core of

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<sup>9</sup> Pamela Klassen expresses this critique in her review of James Bielo’s *Emerging Evangelicals: Faith, Modernity, and the Desire for Authenticity* (2011). Challenging what I consider to be Bielo’s valuable incorporation of phenomenological insights into the anthropological study of American evangelicalism, Klassen writes that, “Granting autonomy to the people one is studying makes sense, but too much of a theoretical commitment to individual agency could be read as an evangelical Protestant conviction in itself” (Klassen 2013: 679). For reasons I will consider shortly, the limiting of individuality to Protestantism strikes me as fundamentally flawed, an example of the type of culturalism that anthropology would be better off without.

“traditional” African folktales. Without foreclosing relationality, these reveal an “African concern also, on occasion, with individuals as individuals” (Lienhardt 1985: 143). Conversely, against claims that Pentecostals are autonomous individuals, numerous recent studies show that, post-conversion, forms of sociality get newly produced (Coleman 2006, Engelke 2010, Haynes 2012) while others persist from the past (Lienhardt 2010, Daswani 2011). To honor such ambiguities, Simon Coleman recommends that we replace the language of trajectory (from relational to individual selves) with that of negotiation since “such negotiations are not one way and certainly do not seem inevitable” (Coleman 2011: 244). Rather than reducing subjectivity to one relatively stable modality or another, determined by such “cultures” as African or Pentecostal, existential anthropology similarly calls attention to the variety of ways of being—egocentric *and* sociocentric—that remain available and negotiable whatever the cultural context (Jackson 2012).

My contention is that though there may be heuristic value in speaking of a Christian, or modern, ideology of the self, care must be taken not to ontologize ideologies. To the extent they apply, they are best seen as applying episodically, in response to the changing circumstances of a person’s life. So many of those whom I came to know over the course of my fieldwork limited their actions to neither a “Pentecostal” nor “traditional” frame, neither an urban nor rural one, neither an individual nor a relational one. Rather, they experimented with and oscillated between the various options available to them. If there is any essence to this kind of selfhood it would be its irreducible multiplicity, its intrinsic mobility. Existentialists have captured this paradox with terms such as the “journeying self” (Natanson 1970) and the “homo viator” (Marcel 1962).

Those among whom I lived might more playfully deploy the metaphor of the polygamous man. He must provide for the wellbeing of each of his wives and all of their children, a less than

enviable role in a society so marked by scarcity. Given matrilineal residence patterns among the Makhuwa, discharging this responsibility requires that he spend much of his time walking, usually alone and sometimes all day, between the widely dispersed homesteads of his wives. Once, while returning to Maúa's district capital after a week of work in the villages, I happened to cross paths with an acquaintance, a man I knew to have multiple wives. After exchanging greetings I asked whether he was also heading home. He replied with a hearty laugh. "The polygamous man has no home. He lives on the road!"

### **'The Ends of the Earth'**

So, in a sense, does the ethnographer. Although I initiated my fieldwork in the urban setting of Lichinga, intending to conduct my research exclusively there, the evidence I encountered—of reversible conversions and circular migrations—moved me to make myself a co-participant in the movements of people like Cewalusa and Gildon. I accompanied them back to their rural homes.

I arrived in the district of Maúa in the southern Makhuwa-speaking belt of Niassa province, 200 miles from Lichinga and connected by mostly unpaved roads to it. I decided to carry out the remainder of my fieldwork there, a decision that carried two distinct advantages. For one, Pentecostalism is present there. It is an important, albeit much omitted, fact in Pentecostal studies that this tradition is not limited to the cities of the global South. According to historian David Maxwell (2006a: 390):

The recent literature depicts African Pentecostalism as urban, electronic, transnational and elitist, strongly associated with the values of neo-liberalism. There is truth in all of

these characterisations but not enough research has been done on Pentecostalism in townships and rural locations where the majority of adherents lie.<sup>10</sup>

This study responds to the relative lacuna of rural African Pentecostal studies by exploring the phenomenon in one particular rural location. Here, Pentecostalism looks different than it does elsewhere, not least in its lack of explosive growth.

A second advantage is inherent to long-term, localized fieldwork.<sup>11</sup> As a Makhuwa proverb puts it about a different kind of fieldwork, “To have too big a field is to fail to produce” (*Wunnuwa ematta kahiyene oruwerya*), a recognition of the greater crop yield that comes from a relatively delimited field. This is not to replicate the bygone method of finding a stable, self-contained village in which to carry out anthropological research because, as this dissertation will show, even the most delimited settings are replete with instabilities and interactions. Narrowing my own field to Maúa allowed for the study of Pentecostalism in terms not solely of transnational processes and global circuits, an important thrust of much recent scholarship (e.g., Corten and Marshall-Fratani 2001, Martin 2002, Robbins 2004, Meyer 2010), but of the *reception* of churches that in every case originate elsewhere.<sup>12</sup> My focus is on the recipients more than on the transmitters of Pentecostalism. Unlike most studies of conversion, this one focuses more on that *from which* than that *to which*, people convert. It attempts to trace the local

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<sup>10</sup> A similar critique appears in Englund 2007a: 480-481.

<sup>11</sup> I share Harri Englund’s and James Leach’s concern that such situated fieldwork entailing immersion in an unfamiliar place, requiring at least elementary acquisition of an unknown language, has gone out of fashion, losing ground to globalization and modernization frameworks that have become hegemonic in an anthropological discipline increasingly striving for academic relevance even at the cost of immersive fieldwork (Englund and Leach 2000).

<sup>12</sup> In conceiving my project this way, I align it with that of philosopher Michel de Certeau (1984) who calls attention to the ambiguities that arise in the ways cultural goods are appropriated and utilized in everyday practice, as opposed to the singularity and totality of their original production.

dynamics that help make sense of the Pentecostal counter-narrative at the heart of this dissertation.

As much as in Lichinga, in the sparsely populated district of Maúá, as well, the few Pentecostal churches present have been tepidly embraced. The first to arrive was the Assembly of God African (*Assembléia de Deus Africana*, hereafter ADA), which began in rural Zimbabwe (Southern Rhodesia) in 1968 but spread transnationally almost immediately. By 1977, there were 50 branches in Mozambique, spread mainly through returning labor migrants to the central provinces of Manica and Sofala, which share the Shona language with Zimbabwe (Maxwell 2006b: 99-101). The church later expanded into the northern provinces of Mozambique despite the disrupting event of civil war. Not long after that war, in 1999, a former soldier who encountered the church in Niassa's second city of Cuamba brought it to Maúá district. At the time I lived there, the district contained one central ADA congregation in Maúá's district capital and two smaller congregations in outlying villages. The membership statistics at each branch cannot be stated exactly due to the fluid nature of people's involvement, but at the district church I regularly observed 25-30 worshippers on Sunday services. Approximately half of these were *vientes*, people residing in Maúá for employment purposes but who consider home to be elsewhere.

The district pastor, Pastor Simões, himself not native to Maúá, was proud to tell me when I first met him that he holds morning prayer meetings during the week; his enthusiasm waned, however, when I expressed interest in attending. He may not have wanted me, as an outside researcher obviously interested in his church, to see what I later learned to be the case, that the only regularly attendees of those services were Pastor Simões and his wife. In Kaveya, the village of 700 people where I lived for the duration of my fieldwork, eight to twelve people



regularly attended the Sunday services, not including children. This church is the one I most participated in, the one which Mutáli, Leonardo, and Jemusse attended, and the source of most of this dissertation's narrative details. In the third congregation, in another peripheral village, only four people regularly attended; they met in the home of that branch's elder (*ancião*), the local elementary school's head administrator. These numbers may seem paltry yet, it should be noted, they do not tell the whole story. For besides the regular attendees, many people living in vicinity of these branches have a history of having attended. Many have appeared sporadically and selectively, particularly in critical moments of their lives. This pattern of passing and partial, yet nonetheless fervent, participation is, as we have already seen with the churches in Lichinga, a crucial characteristic of Pentecostalism in northern Mozambique.

The other Pentecostal presence in Maúa is the Evangelical Assembly of God (*Evangélica Assembléia de Deus*, hereafter EAD). Unlike the ADA church which conducts its services in a mixture of Portuguese and Makhuwa, the EAD church, reflective perhaps of its Brazilian origin, exclusively uses Portuguese. The history of this church in Maúa mirrors the pattern of participation of many local people. It opened, closed, and reopened. After its founding, in the early 2000s, there were as many as 20 people regularly involved. But a combination of factors, most significantly lack of longevity on the part of the Brazilian missionaries who established the church, led to decline. In 2004, when only three people were regularly worshipping at the EAD, the rains that came down that year disintegrated the mud walls. The threat of structural damage due to rain is not uncommon in rural districts like Maúa. What is uncommon is the lack of commitment to re-plastering the walls, the dearth of laborers to fortify them after each rainy season. When the church building collapsed, so too did the church. It reopened six years later, in 2010, when a young pastor—Pastor Manuel—was sent by the central EAD church from his

home city, a major port city in Nampula province. Pastor Manuel managed to revive participation to its earlier levels. On every visit to the church's Sunday services in 2012, I would note a regular attendance of approximately 20. Yet the vast majority, much more so than even at the nearby ADA church, were *vientes*: business and government elites. Only two of the 20 regular attendees were from Maúá itself. In both the ADA and EAD cases, what is relevant and revealing is that these churches were not absent in the district of Maúá. It is not that Pentecostalism failed to arrive but that it, having arrived, failed to grow in the spectacular ways the Pentecostalization thesis would lead one to believe it should.

These Pentecostal churches were not the first “world religions” to arrive on the scene. The two predominant religions (*ittini*) in the district had been and continue to be Islam and Catholicism. Islam arrived first, spreading from the Swahili coast into the matrilineal zones of southern Africa's interior in the late nineteenth century. This was, and continues to be, an Islam highly syncretized with sacrificial rituals, initiation rituals, and other aspects of ancestral religion (Alpers 2000). In 1938, Roman Catholicism arrived, brought by missionaries of the Consolata order, based in Italy. At first, Catholicism barred ritual healers and diviners from baptism, and proscribed ancestral veneration. The official policy changed dramatically in the 1960s, at the time of the Second Vatican Council, such that some of the most sensitive ethnological and linguistic information about the Makhuwa today come from such European Catholic priests as Giuseppe Frizzi, Francisco Lerma Martinez, and Elia Ciscato (see, e.g., Filippi and Frizzi 2005, Frizzi 2008, Lerma Martinez 2008, Ciscato 2012). Father Frizzi, born and educated in Italy, has ministered in Niassa province since 1975 and specifically Maúá district since 1987, remaining with the population through the turmoil of civil war and despite the Mozambican government's post-independence campaign against organized religion and other forms of “obscurantism.” He is

largely responsible for leading the local Catholic church through its liberalization of attitudes toward Makhuwa “tradition” such that today the Catholic church not only tolerates such things as ritual healing and divination but even sponsors annual initiation ceremonies in conjunction with Makhuwa ritual specialists.

The acceptance by both Islam and Catholicism of traditional practices and the success, in particular, of Father Frizzi’s promotion of an inculturated form of Christianity fosters a great deal of anxiety among the recently arrived Pentecostal leaders, the sense that their evangelistic work suffers an unusually potent obstacle in Maúa district. As Brother Peter, the Zimbabwe-born convener of the local branch of the Christian Council of Mozambique (*Conselho Cristão de Moçambique*), a Protestant ecumenical body, put it:

It is a battle that we brought from Muvaco, from Marrupa, from Beira, to come here, to combat these evils. When we arrive here, sometimes people come with energy, with great energy, but when they arrive here, just crossing the border from Metarica to Maúa, it seems like angels of the devil immobilize us... Yes, the word of the Lord here in Maúa is very difficult. If not for us, I would say that here in Maúa there exists no Holy Spirit but only evil spirits.

So framing their efforts in terms of a cosmic battle serves, in part, to rationalize the failure of Pentecostal churches to grow in Maúa as they do elsewhere, even in other parts of southern Niassa province such as the neighboring district of Metarica. It also goes a long way toward assuring the various church leaders—almost all of whom, as Brother Peter said, come from elsewhere—that they have arrived at the true “ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8, NRSV) to which Jesus is said to have directed his disciples. As Pastor Manuel of the EAD said when, over a meal on his compound one day, we commiserated about our common experience coming from relatively affluent places to the austere hinterland of Maúa: “People back home warned me: Maúa is a place where you arrive alive and leave dead.”

## Conversion as a Spatial Practice

Aside from the pastors' sense of demonic impediments, there are many other explanations for why Pentecostalism does not or why it would not thrive in a place like Maúá. Conventional assumptions that Pentecostalism grows most rapidly in previously Christianized areas (Meyer 2004: 453) imply that growth would be weak in areas lacking a history of Christian presence. Linda van de Kamp makes such a claim specifically about Mozambique when she describes the country's "more Muslim north" as resistant to Pentecostal growth (van de Kamp 2011: 18n.27). Whatever the validity of this argument, it should be noted that although northern Mozambique is indeed considerably more Islamic than central and southern Mozambique, Catholicism has been at least as prevalent as Islam since the early twentieth century in many parts of Mozambique's north (see, e.g., West 2005: 109-132) and in contiguous southern Tanzania as well (Green 2003). Another demographic sector associated with the growth of Pentecostalism is that of urban, upwardly mobile people (Meyer 2004: 460). An implication could be drawn here, as well, that a rural district like Maúá, populated primarily by subsistence farmers, lacks the socio-economic profile wherein Pentecostalism flourishes. There may be more explanatory value here, although we have already observed that the provincial capital of Lichinga witnessed very little Pentecostal growth despite being a large urban setting. Meanwhile, researchers in other rural parts of Africa have reported significant Pentecostal impact (e.g., Jones 2011).

What most interested me in my attempts to understand the ambivalence I saw displayed toward Pentecostalism is that whenever I asked ordinary men and women why they do or do not participate in the new churches, most struggled to articulate an answer. There were exceptions, of course: *vientes*, the merchants and civil servants who grew up outside Maúá with longer histories of involvement with the churches, articulated conventional conversion narratives of

having been in the depths of crisis before finding redemption in Jesus Christ (Harding 1987). But by and large, Makhuwa-speaking people of Maúa district had no ideological or narratological formulation for why they are in the Pentecostal churches, why they are not in them, or why they circulate in and out of them. This absence of what we might call reasoned justifications for their behavior should be taken seriously. It is an indictment on the explanatory schemes outsiders (whether religious leaders or academic scholars) tend to impose on a situation. Rather than trying to find ways to reduce complex and contradictory phenomena to some sensible pattern of cause-and-effect, I was forced by the unreasoned pragmatism of the people I worked with to turn elsewhere: to mundane metaphors, historical experience, and embodied practices. In the Makhuwa case, these were specifically metaphors, experiences, and practices of mobility.

According to the standard Makhuwa-Portuguese dictionary, *conversão* translates as *opittikuxa murima*, literally, “change of heart” (Filippi and Frizzi 2005: 1034). Yet whenever villagers talked with me about switching religious affiliations or practices, they never used that term. Much more common were mundane (one might say pedestrian) verbs denoting spatial movement: to move in the sense of migrate (*othama*) or in the sense of leaving one religion and entering another (*ohiya ettini ekina*, *ovolowa ettini ekina*). Conversion, it turns out, is expressed spatially and bodily; it is a migratory movement, as much physical as spiritual.<sup>13</sup> Religious change is a spatial matter, less a change of heart than a change of place.

It turned out that my initial research focus—at the intersection of migration and conversion—could be maintained. Neither *othama* (to move) nor *ohiya ni ovolowa* (to leave and to enter) is particular to religious change; these terms are used to designate all sorts of

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<sup>13</sup> This accords with one ancient Greek word for conversion—*epistrophe*—which connotes turning or returning, in contrast with another—*metanoia*—which suggests something more like rebirth and the transformation of interior attitudes (Hadot 1968).

geographic relocations, including the circulations described earlier between countryside and city. However, it is not that urban migration and Pentecostal conversion are two expressions of underlying historical processes, as Piot claims in his discussion of the main features of post-Cold War Africa.<sup>14</sup> Rather, migration is a metaphor for conversion.

In order to understand the nature of religious change, therefore, I set about studying the nature of regional change. I discovered in short order that practices of mobility—of going but, just as often, of coming—are foundational to the Makhuwa sense of self. One may speak of a Makhuwa disposition toward mobility, inculcated in various ways to be addressed in this dissertation and finding expression in matters as mundane as everyday rituals of greeting and of healing. The commonest of verbal greetings is not “are you well?” but “are you walking well?” (*Munetta phama?*), suggesting a primarily kinetic conception of wellbeing; and as seen in the details of the *mirusi* ceremony narrated in the preface, restoration to health entails bodily transformations, and those bodily transformations require bodily transportations.

The argument of this dissertation will thus unfold as an exploration of variations on the theme of mobility. Part one (*othama*) and part two (*ohiya ni ovolowa*) are named for what I have just discussed as the two most common ways of saying “to convert.” The chapters of part one attend to histories and mythologies of geographic movement, evidence of how wrong it would be to limit mobility to modernity. To be “rooted” in Makhuwa tradition is paradoxically to be grounded in a transitory, semi-nomadic way of life. Makhuwa historical experience and

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<sup>14</sup> Charles Taylor makes a similar connection between migration and conversion. He describes “the great disembedding” in the history of the West—the quintessentially modern “ability to imagine the self outside of a particular context”—as finding expression in two practical concerns: “Should I emigrate? Should I convert to another religion/no religion” (Taylor 2004: 55).

personhood entail an ability to adapt quickly to changing circumstances, circumstances that remain unpredictable and precarious up to the present.

The chapters of part two shift attention to mobile practices manifest in the lived body. The argument here is that such lifecycle events as those surrounding initiation and illness cultivate and express a bodily disposition toward mobility. In these chapters I also highlight the resonance of discontinuous spheres—between, for example, male and female, young and old, bush and village, night and day—even prior to the colonial-era bifurcation of social life into discrete domains. Thus, movement is best seen not as frictionless fluidity but as coexistent with stasis, as entailing traversals and reversals across borders.

Part three takes its title (*okhala-no*, meaning “to be with”) from another crucial Makhuwa concept—not one used for “conversion” but one that sheds light on the symbiotic and interconnected manner in which the Makhuwa carry out their lives. Chapter five, focused on gender, argues that women, better than men, exhibit Makhuwa propensities increasingly under threat from market logics, particularly the propensity for maintaining a plurality of identities and practices across increasingly rigid religious boundaries. Chapter six takes up what it means “to be with” the Pentecostal tradition by attending to Pentecostal ritual practice and theological content. No less than ancestral traditions explored throughout the dissertation, Pentecostalism is also a “mobile tradition.” This allows it to be experienced, precisely through its dynamics of rupture, as an extension of indigenous ways of being.

The argument to be developed points up a profound paradox, that of rupture and radical change as cross-cultural constants and continuities. Convertibility is a mode of being that is present as much in Makhuwa traditions as in Pentecostal traditions, and therefore also in people’s oscillations between the two. All of this should help contextualize the ambivalence with

the Makhuwa are receiving Pentecostalism into their midst. It should also help introduce a measure of skepticism towards what is a largely unchallenged narrative in the academic study of religion today, that of Pentecostalism's success in Africa and elsewhere. The argument emerging from my research is that the propensity for discontinuous change that contributes to the rise of Pentecostalism can also contribute to its decline. For just as the mobility of the Makhuwa people draws them to the churches and finds reinforcement in the churches, it also facilitates exit *from* the churches. People are predisposed to convert. But once they do so they feel little need to stop.



**PART I**  
***OTHAMA*—TO MOVE**

## ONE

### A Fugitive People

The opening chapters of this dissertation take *othama* (“to move”) as their conceptual principle. Just one of the spatial terms used to describe individuals’ movements between religious traditions, its relevance to the argument of this dissertation lies in its everydayness. Although not precisely nomadic, the Makhuwa-speaking people among whom I lived have a decided propensity for dealing with problems by leaving them behind. This historical predilection for flight in response to ever-changing, but ever-precarious, circumstances suggests that to be “rooted” in Makhuwa tradition is paradoxically to be mobile. It is this fluid way of being that, I argue, informs the facility with which many of the same people who move across space move across religions. The main concern of the present chapter is to demonstrate the banality and reversibility of both migrations and conversions. In so doing, I also establish that the site of my fieldwork is nothing like the insulated and self-enclosed container once considered essential for ethnographic research. It is far too open and fluid, as are the people within it, to be captured by any bounded notion of “the field.” Hence, to introduce the setting of my research, I attend less to the place than to the people who inhabit it today, as always, by moving (*othama*) through it.

#### **Jemusse and Fátima**

In the late afternoon, the sun beginning to set, ten-year-old Ekari did what she normally did when not helping her mother pound grain or fetch firewood. She was playing with her cousins and younger brother on the dusty motor road that connected Kaveya village to the district capital 16 miles away. I imagine she was wearing the same tattered purple dress she always wore and the

same smile with which she greeted me whenever she wandered near. I would look up from the water I was boiling or the notebook in which I was scribbling and whisper our secret word: *mututututututu*. Covering her face and laughing, she would reply with the same. It was our play on the Makhuwa word for motorcycle (*mutututu*).

It was here, on the compound of Ekari's parents, that my wife and I would sleep during the week-long stretches we spent in the countryside. The head of the household, Jemusse, held a low-level leadership position in one of Maúa district's few Pentecostal congregations, Kaveya village's Assembly of God African (*Assembléia de Deus Africana*, hereafter ADA) church; he and his wife, Fátima, were two of its most earnest members. While from Jemusse and Fátima I learned the rudiments of Makhuwa domestic life and Pentecostal piety, I had their children and their playmates to thank for helping me most with the language. They tired less of speaking with me, partly because of our more equitable verbal skills but mainly because they found endlessly amusing all the mistakes I made, and the game of turning each mistake into a new and silly word.

I was away that afternoon—in Maúa's district capital, catching up on correspondences and square meals—but it was told to me that shortly before the time her mother would have called her back, Ekari stepped into the low brush on the edge of the road, where something bit her bare left foot. The swelling was immediate and vomiting ensued. Before long she passed out. A snake bite was nothing new in the area. In the recent past, health clinics offered what many regarded as the best hope. There had been a rudimentary clinic, initiated by the Catholic diocese, near Kaveya. But it had been shut down by Mozambique's health ministry the previous year for reasons unknown to villagers. Lacking that option, Jemusse and Fátima consented to the application of traditional remedies by the local healer, but concentrated their own efforts on prayer. I had seen them pray on many occasions for their children, and it was always with

enormous intensity and vigor. I can only imagine how loud and agonized their cries to Jesus must have been that night, cradling their little girl as she struggled to stay alive.

At various points in the night, it was debated whether to transport Ekari all the way to the district hospital. The elder of Fátima's clan was skeptical, saying that hospitals cannot cure this kind of bite. He meant that the snake that bit her was no ordinary snake, but he may also have been referring to the common knowledge that in this part of the world even Maúa's top biomedical facility was so under-equipped that the time spent getting her there—hours by bicycle over a deeply rutted road—could be put to better use. So Jemusse and Fátima decided to keep doing the best they could with the little they had until daybreak, at which time a truck would likely pass by and its driver hopefully take pity. Learning these devastating details, I could not help but hear Ekari's whisper— *mututututututu*—and wish with all my being that it, and I, had been there that night. It was not, and before the sun rose on a new day, Ekari breathed her last.

I left for Kaveya as soon as the news reached me, and arrived to the sight of dozens of people holding vigil. The men were gathered on one side of the compound. Some were members of Jemusse's and Fátima's church, others members of their respective clans. Pastor Simões, Maúa's district-level head of the ADA had also come in from the capital. The women, seated together on the other side, were wrapped in meager *capulana* (Makhuwa: *ekuwo*) cloths, Fátima bare-breasted as is customary for mourners in this part of Mozambique. I spotted Jemusse off to the side of the men, cradling himself on the dirt ground. I dropped my helmet, walked swiftly over to him, then fell to my knees and embraced him. He never looked up. "Papá," is all his throat emitted. I held him close, and he cried.

An onlooker with abstract knowledge of Makhuwa cultural codes might have found this strange. Makhuwa men are not supposed to cry. If they do, they do so only on the inside. I often heard the same said of Pentecostals. One of the criticisms most commonly levelled by villagers against their Pentecostal neighbors is that, when a family member dies, they do not cry, a way of saying they callously neglect the proper funerary rites. It is true that pastors, no less than initiation instructors, teach stoicism in the face of hardship, even in the face of death. It is possible, then, that in sobbing uninhibitedly for his daughter Jemusse was violating norms of both the Makhuwa culture and the Pentecostal church to which he belonged. It is possible that I too was violating norms of my community, the social scientific community, failing to keep my research subjects at a proper analytic distance. But in the face of death—the sudden and vicious loss of my good friends’ first-born—codes of conduct meant nothing. Jemusse’s head buried in his knees and my head buried in his shoulder, I held him close, and we cried.

The rest of that day and the next were occupied with preparations for the cemetery visit. Ekari had already been buried in the graveyard of Fátima’s clan. What remained was the third day visit in which we would carry to Ekari’s burial plot a floral arrangement the women put together and a small wooden cross the men were working on. Across the horizontal bar of the cross, Ekari’s name was carefully inscribed with ink produced from a mixture of charcoal dust and the sap of a banana flower. During this period, by Makhuwa tradition, immediate family members were also to shave their heads (*okhweliwa*), although this had not been done. The funeral procession began at daybreak of the third day. We walked silently, single file, with Pastor Simões at the head of the line carrying the cross in one hand and his Bible in the other. We turned off the main road onto a narrow footpath, following it deep into the woodlands until we reached a clearing, the burial site, studded with mounds of dirt. The men broke off leafy

branches from surrounding trees and, hunched over, used them to smooth the dirt around Ekari's burial plot. After the cross was planted and the flowers set down, all of us crouched low and turned to Pastor Simões.

He began with a short prayer but quickly launched into his homily. Less a reminiscence about the young girl who died, it was more an excoriation of Makhuwa conceptions of the afterlife. Ekari's *munepa* (spirit; pl. *minepa*) is now in heaven, he instructed, and she will not return. She will remain with God and with Jesus. It is only evil spirits (*minepa sonanara*) who return to the living, demanding food and drink. "But if you do the will of God, you will arrive in heaven and you will not return anymore." Ekari had done the will of God. She would not return; she had already forgotten all the troubles of the world, not least her terrible final hours:

Now she hears nothing, sees nothing, thinks nothing, eats nothing. Everything is forgotten. Therefore, we cannot do *esataka* for the person who passed away. We see many people, other people, who when somebody dies, they go and buy rice, buy a goat, to go and do *esataka*. They say it is to help the person who died. Why did they not help the person when he was alive? Then they say that we do this because our ancestors did it this way. But to follow the ancestors is a lie! It's a lie. Jesus abolished all this. It is nothing.

Pastor Simões was painting an opposition to Makhuwa traditional beliefs about death, grounded as they are in the third day and 40<sup>th</sup> day ceremonies known as *esataka*.<sup>1</sup> These ceremonies are understood to join the living to the dead in an act of accompaniment, accompaniment on the recently deceased's journey to the place of the ancestors: Mount Namuli.<sup>2</sup> As journeys tend to

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<sup>1</sup> Derived through the Swahili *sadaka* and ultimately the Arabic *sadaqah* (voluntary charity), this word used for the funerary rites of the Makhuwa suggests, according to Edward Alpers (2000: 313), "the partial Islamization of pre-Islamic religious practices" among the Makhuwa, though perhaps not as much as among the neighboring Yao.

<sup>2</sup> When we shared with Jemusse and Fátima that Kalinka, my wife, would be returning to our home country early to continue her studies, Jemusse had a visibly concerned look on his face and asked, "if we give some maize, will it get all the way there?" This feature of Makhuwa hospitality—not only receiving guests well but sending them off well—illustrates the concern with accompaniment at the time of death. In the same way that food offerings are given to the departing *munepa* at *esataka* ceremonies, to keep it fed on its journey back to Mount Namuli, Kalinka—preparing for her own journey back home—was being offered sustenance for her journey.

be, these were spiritual renewals. One elder told me, “We do not venerate the dead. People do not die. They leave this world for the other world, like when we were in the stomach of our mothers and then left it to enter the world.” Death is therefore not a radical rupture, a discontinuity with the past. It is a passage or a transition from one mode of being to another. Yet as evident from the analogy to childbirth, it is no less monumental because of that. Furthermore, just as there is a passage out, there is also a return. *Minepa* revisit the living, appearing in dreams, requesting to be fed, offering help to some, causing havoc to others.

It is precisely such regressive motions that Pastor Simões was concerned to denounce. His message to all of us gathered around Ekari’s burial plot was that Jesus introduced a new conception of death: one without return, a permanent state of rest at God’s side. There was therefore no need for *estataka*, nor, for similar reasons, for *okhweliwa*: “even if you shave your head, the child has already gone.” Our responsibility is not to the dead but to the living, particularly at this time to the bereaved family. There was a great deal of compassion in Pastor Simões’s message for my grief-stricken friends, consistent with his willingness to overlook that they permitted the use of traditional remedies on their daughter. He seemed to respect that in such dire straits, they simply could not refuse any of the few measures available to them. But he was going to make sure no more “backsliding” occurred. He knew, no doubt, that it is at times of death—an entirely too common feature of daily life in Kaveya village—that the threat of backsliding loomed largest.

After Pastor Simões returned to the district capital, conversations at the compound turned to the deeper cause of this tragedy. The elder was deemed correct. This was not just any snake. The bite of the *mulalwe* snake is not usually fatal, all the proof needed that this particular one had been transformed. A sorcerer had sent it, and the identity of that sorcerer—an estranged

uncle of Fátima's who lived a short distance down the road—was known to all. This same man had caused a similarly shocking death only one year prior, of another member of the extended family. The occupants of that household responded by moving to a far distant corner of Kaveya village.

Jemusse and Fátima were now making similar plans, “to leave him here alone to do his sorcery,” Fátima said. Because the rainy season was fast approaching, and because they wanted to remove their two surviving children from further danger, they planned quickly. After consulting with clan counselors and elders, it was decided that they would decamp to Maúa's district capital. Among that town's 25,000 inhabitants were both biological kin and surrogate kin—the ADA's central district congregation—on whom Jemusse and Fátima would be able to count for support. Jemusse also foresaw opportunities to reestablish his carpentry trade; although timber was only available in the dense woodlands of outlying villages, the clients who bought his doors and windows resided in town. Only two concerns held Jemusse and Fátima back. One was limited means with which to transport their few belongings—maize and beans, mortar and pestle, carpentry tools, a bundle of clothes. The other was concern about me. In as touching an example of the generosity with which they welcomed me into their lives, they worried about abandoning the compound I had come to rely on as my rural base. I begged them not to think at all about the second problem, and to let me help with the first. I offered to hire a truck from town that could pick them up and transport them there. It was a small and inadequate reciprocation for their hospitality and companionship. Just before the rains arrived, they returned to the cemetery to let Ekari know they were leaving (and ask that her *munepa* migrate with them), loaded their belongings and surviving children onto the flatbed pickup, and left for the district capital.



I was happy to see my friends do what they thought was best, as were their family, friends, and fellow congregants. Not, however, Pastor Simões. “It is not correct to just get up and leave,” he said. “They should have remained there. They should have had the courage to fight [Portuguese: *lutar*].” Turning sermonic though it was just us talking, he invoked Jesus’ response to Satan testing him in the desert. Jesus did not flee, but remained firm in his faith. He stood up to Satan. “A strong person would stay, use the power of prayer and fasting. Only if the person is weak will he leave the situation, change locations.” Besides, merely fleeing the problem does nothing to solve it. “You cannot flee from Satan. If this is sorcery, you cannot flee from sorcery. People here say that the sorcerer travels by night.” Pastor Simões did not deny that the occult forces of the sorcerer were real and blameworthy here, even if he cast this spiritual force onto a larger cosmological plane. He merely maintained that the Holy Spirit (*Munepa Wothela*) is stronger, that it holds the power to protect those who serve it. If Jemusse’s and Fátima’s faith were strong enough, they could have stayed, fought, and prevailed. This emphasis on fixity recalled the funeral message I heard him deliver only a few weeks earlier: his insistence that Ekari’s *munepa* would go to heaven and not return. It would stay there, with God, with Jesus. Nearly everyone and everything around Jemusse and Fátima, however, told them differently. Not only was Ekari’s *munepa* on the move. So too, to protect their remaining children, must they be.

### **Fight or Flight**

Pentecostalism, at least in its formal teachings, emphasizes fixity and faithfulness. This is evident in Pastor Simões’s critique of the migratory response that Jemusse and Fátima chose for themselves; it is equally evident in his regular sermons enjoining militaristic vigilance against “traditional” customs and practices. There are at least two discursive contexts within which to

situate these emphases. One is that of spiritual warfare, wherein conflicts of the physical world are manifestations of conflicts in the occult realm (DeBernardi 1999). This takes a particular form in Pentecostal discourse: of a cosmic struggle between the Holy Spirit and Satanic forces. Yet shorn perhaps of its extreme Manicheanism, the idea of occult forces contending in ways that redound to the mundane is not uniquely Pentecostal. Ogbu Kalu argues, in fact, that one reason for Pentecostalism's takeoff in Africa is a basic ontological compatibility on this point: "Both traditional African culture and Pentecostalism affirm that 'things which are seen are made of things which are not seen' (Hebrews 11:3b) and that events in the manifest world are first decided in the spirit world" (Kalu 2008: 178).

A second context for Pastor Simões' advocacy of fight over flight is the Mozambican political project of nation-state formation. Mozambican independence, in 1975, came about through a combination of two factors: first, the wearing down of Portuguese military and administrative forces by FRELIMO (the Mozambican Liberation Front) in a war of independence that began in 1964; and, secondly, the overthrow of the Salazar regime in Portugal's Carnation Revolution, soon after which Portugal transitioned to democracy and relinquished all its overseas colonies. The Mozambican nationalist narrative exclusively emphasizes the former. Independence was hard won, the result of armed struggle against the Portuguese. The prominence, and celebration, of warfare in this narrative is expressed by the AK-47 on Mozambique's flag, one of very few nations to feature a weapon and the only one to display a modern rifle. Significantly, the original post-independence Mozambican flag did not include the weapon, nor the hoe (symbol of agricultural production) that also appears on the contemporary flag. Both were added in 1983, in the midst of FRELIMO's war (1977-1992) against RENAMO (the Mozambican National Resistance). Through such slogans as "*a luta*

*continua*” (“the struggle continues”), FRELIMO presented this civil war as a continuation of the liberation struggle, this one also against a foreign adversary: RENAMO, which was organized, financed, and operated by the apartheid governments of South Africa and Rhodesia.<sup>3</sup> The weapon on the flag therefore not only honors the valiant resistance with which FRELIMO warriors responded to Portuguese colonialists, but serves as reminder of the need for continued vigilance against threatening foes.

These two larger contexts—the occult context of spiritual warfare and the nationalist context of physical warfare—are not entirely separate. This is the argument of Harry West (2005) in his acclaimed study of the origin and use of sorcery discourse among the Makonde, an ethno-linguistic group also of northern Mozambique. For the Makonde, sorcery attacks do not go unchallenged. Against sorcery of ruin, sorcery of construction (Makonde: *kupilikula*) is deployed to defend one’s self and one’s kin. Most valuable about West’s ethnography is his illustration of how, for the Makonde, this dialectic of sorcery and counter-sorcery has provided an idiom for comprehending and controlling a long history of entanglements with unfamiliar forces. Thus, the projects of Portuguese colonizers and Catholic missionaries, of FRELIMO modernizers and neo-liberal reformers, have all been subjected to inversion and overturning through Makonde sorcery discourse. Arguably the most pernicious of those forces was that of Portuguese colonialism. For

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<sup>3</sup> To what extent RENAMO should be seen as “foreign” and to what extent internal to Mozambique is a matter of great historical debate. Against the prevailing nationalist ideology, Christian Geffray (1990a) argues that one of the reasons RENAMO proved capable of gaining support in the countryside is because of FRELIMO’s policies that disfavored and disenfranchised peasant populations. One policy in particular, that of agricultural collectivization (to be discussed in chapter two) arose out of FRELIMO’s project of socialist reform. The appearance of the hoe along with the rifle in Mozambique’s 1983 flag could therefore be seen as an expression of this effort to “modernize” and appropriate the output of Mozambique’s largely agrarian population.

their central role in combatting this foe, the Makonde until today hold a privileged place in the narrative of Mozambican nationhood.<sup>4</sup>

If, among the Makonde, the idiom of counter-sorcery expresses, and mobilizes, opposition to powerful forces, ought not the same be true of their Makhuwa neighbors, Jemusse and Fátima among them? In fact, in the days following the death of their daughter, some clan members attempted to prevail upon them that the only way to solve the problem once and for all was to eliminate the cause, to kill the relative who, through occult means, sent the venomous snake. This could be done by enlisting the aid of a *namuku*, an occult specialist with the powers of counter-sorcery.<sup>5</sup> They decided, instead, to move. When I first asked Jemusse why he dismissed the advice of his kin, he cited the Pentecostal injunction against sorcery and other ancestral practices. “It’s because I handed everything over to God. ‘God, you are the one who made everything, heaven and earth, our entire body.’ I didn’t go to the *namuku*. It’s true.” Yet as we have seen, even the leader of their Pentecostal church, Pastor Simões, recommended a kind of counter-sorcery. Occult warfare is common to both Pentecostalism and indigenous traditions. What differ are the weapon (prayer rather than sorcery) and the cosmological partner (the Holy Spirit rather than ancestral spirits). Eschewing counter-attack of either sort, Jemusse and Fátima opted instead for simple flight, one among other of what James Scott (1985) calls “weapons of the weak.”

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<sup>4</sup> The Makonde African National Union (MANU) was the most significant protonationalist force during the late colonial period. Its significance beyond the Makonde people is illustrated by its name change: to the Mozambique African National Union. The 1960 massacre of MANU supporters on the Mueda plateau—heartland of the Makonde—is cited as one of the chief catalysts of the war of independence. MANU later merged with two other protonationalist organizations to become FRELIMO (West 2005: 134-136).

<sup>5</sup> The word for this in Makhuwa is *opittikuxa*, a likely cognate of the Makonde *kupilikula*.

This choice of migration over confrontation is consistent with a generally (though not exclusively) non-militant approach to adversity that has long characterized Makhuwa history. Unlike the Makonde, the Makhuwa never held a prestigious place in FRELIMO's narrative of nation-state formation.<sup>6</sup> To the contrary, FRELIMO has long treated the Makhuwa with contempt and suspicion for not adequately backing the cause of militarism against the Portuguese during the war of independence (Funada-Classen 2012: 289-291). The possibility of a real divergence in values came across in conversations I had with Makhuwa elders and chiefs, early visits with whom always addressed who the Makhuwa understand themselves to be. Consistently, responses made reference to two "pillars": *olima* (cultivation/production) and *oyara* (birth/procreation).

"How would these pillars be represented on a flag for the Makhuwa people?" I asked one elder, recalling that the Mozambican flag also espouses two values, one of them also cultivation.

"For Mozambique, it is the hoe and the firearm," I said. "For the Makhuwa, the hoe and...?"

"... the child," he answered without pause.

## **Mobility in Myth**

If Mozambique's nationalist values of defense and vigilance suggest a hunkering down, an act of defiance premised on rootedness in a given identity or land, the Makhuwa value of reproduction, by contrast, evokes natality. As described in the introduction, this is the capacity of all human

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<sup>6</sup> Historian Patrick Chabal distinguishes between "the northern Makonde people (who were integrated with FRELIMO) and their Makua neighbors (who were not)," a difference, interestingly, that did not lead to rival anti-colonial movements (Chabal 2002:114).

action to initiate new beginnings, to release the future from bondage to the past (Arendt 1971: 247). Suggested here is not fixity but existential mobility (Jackson 2013: 227-230), a transference of circumstances and of places, a cultivated deracination. In what follows, I narrate aspects of Makhuwa historical memory that demonstrate the centrality of movement and mobility.

The theoretical significance of this argument rests in its challenge to long-standing stereotypes of traditional societies as static, unchanging, and immobile, in contrast with modern societies marked by transnational flows and globalized circuits.<sup>7</sup> One way in which people fix, or are seen as fixed, in place is through the cosmogonies that reference a determinate point of origin. In the Makhuwa case, that place is a mountain, Mount Namuli, situated in the province of Zambezia which borders Niassa to the south. At nearly 8,000 feet, Namuli is the second tallest peak of Mozambique and tallest of the region, optimal candidate for the cosmic center, the *axis mundi* (Eliade 1959) of the Makhuwa people. As recorded by Francisco Lerma Martinez (2008: 40-43), the first man, originating atop the mountain, one day decided to explore the vast, verdant plains extending from its base. Descending the perilous slopes, he tripped on some boulders, hit

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<sup>7</sup> In his tracing of the development of the world spirit, Hegel remarks after a mere handful of pages on Africa that, “At this point we leave Africa, not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the World; it has no movement or development to exhibit” (Hegel 1956: 99). The subject of the sentence—“we”—is telling, implying that only enlightened Europeans possess the capacity to move and indeed ought to so as not to get mired in the static and timeless condition of Africa. Africanist scholars (e.g., Fabian 1983) have been at the forefront of challenging such a view, yet it persists in such characterizations offered by the likes of James Cox (2007) of indigenous people and religions as, by definition, attached to a location. To take another example, Robin Horton, in his influential theory of conversion, bifurcates the microcosmic and macrocosmic, the former entailing village life and the latter “modern” developments that came with colonialism and the formation of nation states (Horton 1971). By ontologizing this divide, Horton fails to acknowledge how “macrocosmic” are the various engagements with alterity found even within a village setting, how relations with imagined outsides constitute “traditional” or, as he deems it elsewhere, “closed” African societies (Horton 1967). Arjun Appadurai (1988) offers a crucial corrective in an essay that challenges the anthropological tendency to “incarcerate” populations by deeming them “native” to a land and therefore bound to that locality (see also Gupta and Ferguson 1992 and Piot 1999). Yet even Appadurai falls into the old pattern in his *Modernity at Large* (1996) insofar as he limits the imaginative, context-surpassing, powers of the “modern” world to contemporary technologies of long-distance migration and mass media (see Englund 2007b).

the ground hard, and passed out. When he regained consciousness, he opened his eyes to see that blood from his wounds had mixed with water from a stream flowing down the mountain. As the mysterious mixed liquid flowed, it slowly formed into a solid shape: a figure similar to his own. It was woman. From the blood of man, woman came into being; and from the union of this first man and first woman came all future generations. These generations followed the pattern of the first: flowing like streams and voyaging long distances, all the while bringing forth new life.

While the Myth of Namuli certainly orients the Makhuwa to this particular mountain, everyday references to it in proverbs, songs, and stories refer not to the mountain itself. Rather, as with the myth, what is significant is its service as backdrop for the drama of human existence. Not unlike other origin myths—the Abrahamic religions’ Garden of Eden, for example—this one entails a departure: it is said that conflicts developed between the various lineages born of the first man and woman, resulting in each one descending and dispersing to a different region of what is today northern Mozambique. Unusually, however, Namuli is not only the place of origin, but also the place of return. Contained within all references to Namuli is a dialectic of egress and regress, of risking oneself in the world only to later retreat: “From Namuli we come, to Namuli we return” is perhaps the most oft-recited proverb in Makhuwa rituals and storytelling. *Minepa* are understood to return to Namuli, although even this journey (as we have seen) is not instantaneous, nor is the dwelling permanent.<sup>8</sup> *Minepa* frequently reappear in the dreams and daily affairs of the living. They are said to return for two purposes in particular: first, to aid descendants who make flour offerings to them in a ritual called *makeya*; and, secondly, to request/demand the *makeya* food offerings from those descendants. The first reason is consistent

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<sup>8</sup> These spatial dialectics—the continuous interplay of centers and peripheries—call to mind Jacob Olupona’s observation that, “the traditions of certain cultures and societies such as the Yorùbá, the Maori, and many Native American groups... do not draw sharp distinctions between the sacred and the profane but rather view them as dialectical” (Olupona 2011: 23).

with one prominent narrative for movement and migration: a heroic venturing forth, in this case to rescue the living from such hardships as sickness, hunger, and crop failure. The second reason suggests, contrarily, that movement is not always and only the prerogative of the strong, the able, the well-capacitated. In this case, it is movement of the vulnerable, the needy, the hungry. That even *minepa* are beset by the finitude of human existence provides Makhuwa men and women a powerful template with which to conceptualize and strategize their own responses to existential quandaries. When hungry or otherwise under duress, move.<sup>9</sup>

### **Mobility in History**

Archaeological and paleontological evidence reveals the phenomenon of long-distance migration to be as old as *Homo sapiens*. The migration of proto-Bantu speakers from 1000 BCE to 500 CE is responsible for Africa's coast-to-coast reach of a single language family. Outside the continent, the history of settlement is no less a history of mobility. "In geological terms," writes the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah, "it has been a blink of an eye since human beings first left Africa, and there are few spots where we have not found habitation. The urge to migrate is no less 'natural' than the urge to settle" (Appiah 2006: xviii). The history of human civilization, within Africa and "out of Africa," suggests that migration is a normal and unexceptional mode of human being.

For the Makhuwa-speaking populations of Maúa district, arrival into the region resulted from migration tracks (*niphito*, in the singular: a route of community migration) described by

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<sup>9</sup> It is no mere coincidence that two of the ethnonyms used by Makhuwa groups in Maúa district connote movement: Makhuwa-Xirima comes from the word *exerima*, meaning slope or embankment, referring possibly to the slopes of Mount Namuli which ancestors descended and which spirits of the dead (*minepa*) re-ascend; Makhuwa-Metto comes from the word *metto*, meaning "legs," the root "et" itself denoting "movement."



Funada-Classen (2012: 109) as “collective movements [that] were far from random but... were very strategic.” These led to the occupation of the savanna woodlands just north of the Lúrio River. Throughout much of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the rate of movement continued unabated. In response to Arab and then European slave trading, under which the Makhuwa suffered heavily (Boyer-Rossol 2013), flight became a means to evade capture. In various parts of Mozambique, migration was also a strategy for resisting forced-labor policies of Portuguese colonial authorities (Isaacman 1996). In an only slightly more voluntary vein, and also during the colonial era, long-distance labor migrations increased.<sup>10</sup>

In more recent memory, there are three primary reasons for migrations across geographical space: depletion of soil fertility, sorcery attacks, and war. Given the centrality of cultivation for Makhuwa—one of its two “pillars”—the search for fertile land has provided an especially strong impetus. The Makhuwa of Maúa district practice shifting cultivation: rather than rotating crops within a certain field, farmers rotate fields, shifting to a new area every couple of years to preserve the fecundity of the soil. One village elder explained it this way: “Moving [*othama*] is very important. The population stays in one location for various years and the land becomes tired. It goes to a new site, and later thinks of returning because the land returned, recuperated.” Two factors may lie behind this agricultural circulation. One is the abundance of land in Niassa province. As the least densely populated and most densely forested region of Mozambique, it contains all the qualities Igor Kopytoff (1987) attributes to African frontier societies, particularly the quality of highly mobile populations disconnected from centralized political authorities. Another factor may be that shifting cultivation serves the

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<sup>10</sup> Until today stories are told that reference Salisbury (contemporary Harare), stories of people who left to find work but also returned, such circular migrations being common to labor migration in and to Zimbabwe (Potts 2010).

survival interests of populations most marginal to and least benefitting from state power. Scott (2009: 178-219) convincingly argues that for stateless societies, shifting cultivation facilitates flight in case of such unwelcome intrusions as taxation, conscription, enslavement, and war (all significant episodes in the tumultuous history of those among whom I lived).

Not unlike how Jemusse and Fátima moved in the wake of a sorcery attack, the history of how they and other inhabitants of Kaveya village came to be where I met them is replete with tales of macabre misdeeds by neighboring populations. After decades living well along the Nipakwa River, one elder recalled, the people of Kaveya came under attack from lions. A diviner uncovered the cause as sorcery instigated by a neighboring, rival group. Whether at the collective level of village or clan or the micro level of families, sorcery attacks commonly occur. They illustrate the precariousness of life, the indeterminacy of invisible forces that gives rise to what Adam Ashforth (2005), in his study of South African witchcraft, terms “spiritual insecurity.” In a healing ceremony I attended, this spiritual insecurity was expressed in song: “Carry your child, let’s go. // We cannot remain seated in this village.” When I asked one of the elder ritual leaders to explain this line, she referred to ambitious, envious neighbors: “It is the neighbors who speak badly of this person, which is why it is the time to say, ‘Sister, carry your child, let’s go. Let’s find a different place to live. The people here are dangerous.’” She was speaking of sorcerers who render a zone uninhabitable, then added, “It would be like you who came here to Kaveya being told, ‘Let’s go, in this village we see no place to sit.’” Any newcomer must be prepared to encounter resistance. The appropriate response, for me no less than anyone else, is to pack one’s belongings—none more precious than children—and leave.

By far the most vivid and painful episodes of movement among inhabitants of Maúa district were instigated by war. The elders I came to know have lived through two wars: that of

FRELIMO against the Portuguese (1964-1974) and that of FRELIMO against RENAMO (1977-1992). The first war scarcely reached this part of the countryside, which meant most people were able to stay where they were. Such was far from the case with the second war. Harrowing memories continue to haunt the population, memories of rebel fighters entering villages, plundering grain and chickens, raping women without regard to whether they were old or young, menstruating or not, and kidnapping men so as to use them as porters of their plundered goods.

The most common response by peasants to the Mozambican civil war was flight (Lubkemann 2008). Some fled into the forest, others to mountain caves. Yet escape did not always, or immediately, solve the problem. Bullets flew overhead and many people died, if not at the hands of rebel fighters then due to hunger, disease, or animal attacks. In flight, food could not be carried, nor clothes, nor the reed mats used as bedding. The priority was carrying the children. Yet in the most treacherous moments, when speed was of the essence, so too was silence; mothers of crying children had to be left behind and retrieved only when it was safe to do so. The Makhuwa of Maúá district lived this way—“running like chickens” as Fátima recalled it—for approximately five years. They moved from one temporary settlement to another, refugee zones set up by FRELIMO and supplied by international aid organizations. Lack of land for cultivation and the rapid spread of diseases, both owing to the tight concentration of people in refugee zones, forced regular relocations even in this situation of exile. That is why when the fighting finally ended, return routes were rapidly established. Refugees were eager to return to places where, many told me, they could “breathe” (*omumula*) again. The current inhabitants of Kaveya village returned to the same area of the Nipakwa River they had earlier occupied. Rebel fighters had burned everything to the ground so they had to reconstruct their homes and renovate their crop fields, but they were content simply to be able to breathe freely once again.

Colonialism, slavery, war, soil depletion, and sorcery saturate the historical consciousness of those among whom I lived. Yet the response was neither to resist identifiable adversaries nor to stay put and acquiesce. Rather it was to move, to flee. Through such experiences, the Makhuwa self has come to take on the qualities of a fugitive self. Not force, but agility and intelligence, are valued. This is evident in folk tales that celebrate the rabbit's ability to outsmart and outmaneuver elephants and hippopotami.<sup>11</sup> Yet to be agile or flexible (*waluwa*) does not necessarily mean to be fast. Even more than the rabbit, those among whom I lived identified with the chameleon. In addition to its adaptability to changing surroundings, the chameleon is celebrated for its slowness and deliberateness, the constancy of its movements: *vakhani vakhani ntoko namanriya* (step-by-step like the chameleon) is a common saying.

In ceremonies as well, one notes this emphasis on movement. In curative rituals, *minepa* are beseeched to "open the path" and "unbind" the afflicted, while healers procure therapeutic substances through long-distance circulations and border-crossings.<sup>12</sup> The most common of ancestral rites, the flour offering known as *makeya*, derives its name from a word having to do

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<sup>11</sup> Here is one such tale, recorded during a storytelling session in Kaveya village one night: "This is a story about Rabbit. Rabbit went to the river and in it he saw Hippopotamus. Rabbit said to Hippopotamus, 'Look, Hippopotamus, I will bring my rope and tie it to you. Then I will go into the forest with the other end of the rope and pull you with so much force that I will pull you out of the water.' Hippopotamus said, 'You are small. You think you can pull me out of the water? I will pull you into the water.' Rabbit said, 'Let's see.' He then said, 'Wait for me,' and ran into the forest to find Elephant. When he saw Elephant, Rabbit said to him 'If I tie you to this rope and begin to pull, can I make you go into the water?' Elephant said, 'You, Rabbit, are small. You think you can pull me from the forest all the way to the water?' Rabbit said, 'Let's try it out.' Rabbit tied the rope to Elephant and said, 'Wait for me.' He then left Elephant to meet Hippopotamus again, to whom he said, 'Ok, let's play our game.' Then Rabbit tied the rope to Hippopotamus and said, 'Wait for me and listen for me. When you hear me whistle, that's the signal to begin.' Rabbit made sure that Hippopotamus was in one place and Elephant in another so that neither would be able to see each other. He then went and positioned himself in the middle. Then Rabbit whistled, and the game began. Force, force, force, between Elephant and Hippopotamus, and the rope became taut and did not budge. Then Rabbit yelled out, 'Let's see who is a man! Come on! Come on! Come on!' And it continued like this until the sun went down. Then Rabbit called the game to a halt. He ran to Hippopotamus and asked, 'What happened? Did you succeed in dragging me into the river?' Hippopotamus said, 'Rabbit, you are a real man.' Rabbit removed the chord. Rabbit then ran to Elephant. 'What happened? Did you succeed in dragging me into the forest?' Elephant said, 'No, you are a real man.' So this is Rabbit."

<sup>12</sup> For examples of this from various parts of southern Africa, see van Binsbergen 1995 and Luedke and West 2006.

with this transient state of being. Nowadays, *makeya* is offered with requests for healing, rainfall, and protection from wild animals. Given the word's etymological link to the verb "*omaka*" (to inhabit) and the modal form of that word—"omakeya," to be inhabitable—the ritual may have arisen more specifically in the context of a new and unfamiliar place of residence. *Makeya* petitions were for health and security in one's new, though never permanent, home. This illustrates how wellbeing is closely connected to mobility, a capacity for beginning anew instilled by historical experiences in which the inability to move easily meant the inevitability of death. Yet, it is worth recalling, even after death the *munepa* migrates back to Mount Namuli, then back to the living again: further evidence that mobility, indeed circularity, is not a mere byproduct of our hyper-connected era of globalization. Egress has always been a part of "traditional" culture, egress followed almost always by regress.

## **Religious Movements**

When Jemusse and Fátima moved to the district capital I lost my home base in Kaveya village. I did not care to sleep alone on their now abandoned compound, in part for fear of the snake that could just as easily have bitten me (although I was assured sorcery attacks happen only between real, not fictive, kin). It was also my final few weeks in Mozambique, and spending the time in town, synthesizing a year's worth of experiences, was appropriate for where I was in my work.

So we remained neighbors—not cohabitants of the same compound as in Kaveya, but now of Maúa's district capital. However, the rhythm of life in town did not allow for the lazy, hours-long conversations I so enjoyed back in Kaveya, chomping on a shared cassava root in the shade of a mango tree. While working hard to reinitiate his carpentry trade, Jemusse's first

priority was securing a means of feeding himself, Fátima, and their two surviving children. They had managed to transport sacks of maize and beans for the impending rains, but he was already behind the seasonal calendar for next year's harvest. The district capital had a vast market, but few residents had the money to rely solely upon it. Nearly every family in town, not unlike in the villages, tended its own *machamba*. The difference was the distance. The nearest unclaimed plot Jemusse could obtain was an hour walk away: not particularly close, but not unusually far for the 95% of town dwellers who sustained themselves this way.

Given how much more busy Jemusse immediately became after moving, I accepted that in the remaining weeks of my fieldwork I would not see much of him. It therefore took me by surprise one evening when, after an obviously long day of work, Jemusse stopped by the Catholic mission compound where I resided. I was delighted to see him, and he too looked pleased, albeit tired. After exchanging greetings I led him to the compound's *alpendre* (Makhuwa: *muttheke*) and asked him to wait while I fetch for us some water. When I returned, before I could hand him his cup and sit down, he opened his mouth to speak.

"Papá, there's something I want to tell you."

"Go ahead, Papá," I replied as I sat down, struck by the sudden change in tone.

"You know my thought was to attack [the perpetrator of the sorcery attack] with counter-sorcery [*opittikuxa*]. I was thinking a lot of things right after my daughter died. I was thinking of doing counter-sorcery. The family of Mamá were telling us to attack him because there have been five deaths because of him now."

He told me that one week after Ekari's death he traveled to Cuamba. The intent was to consult with a powerful *namuku* about visiting deadly counterforce upon the sorcerer responsible

for his daughter's death. Despite the distance, Jemusse made sure to complete the roundtrip in one day, so as not to make public the extent to which he nearly engaged the occult forces barred by his Pentecostal faith.

He eventually did not go through with it, opting instead to accept my financial offer of help to move, but that he had come so close was news to me. I was touched by his openness, his revelation of a secret I had not pried about, nor even suspected. Of course it was common knowledge that he had permitted a traditional healer to offer his aid on that terrible night, also that Fátima cut her hair (*okhweliwa*) soon after the funeral when Pastor Simões was no longer around, and that an *esataka* ceremony was conducted by Fátima's family.<sup>13</sup> Yet this admission of consultation with a *namuku* seemed transgressive in a much deeper way. It probably would have incensed Pastor Simões and provoked the reprimand that the other offenses did not. It certainly shocked me, as I struggled to reconcile my impression of Jemusse and Fátima as peaceful and hospitable friends with this admission that they very nearly tried killing a man.

I thanked Jemusse for sharing this intimate detail, but wondered aloud why he chose to tell me just then. His answer had to do with a desire to unload his sense of having sinned against Jesus, against his church. "When I inform you," he said, "I don't have to think any more about this because I am speaking what I did, and when I speak it my words have left my body and are now with you."

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<sup>13</sup> Ekari's *munepa* had visited both Fátima and Fátima's mother in dreams, informing them she was hungry. Without hesitation Fátima's family back in Kaveya organized an *esataka* ceremony. Jemusse and Fátima contributed sacks of rice and three chickens, though they themselves did not attend. This was not an uncommon *modus vivendi* worked out by Pentecostals, a kind of participation in funerary rites that would be satisfactory to both communities of obligation (spiritual kin and biological kin) without making one way of living, and of dying, exclusive of the other.

“I am free now,” he added, “because I don’t have to think any more about what I was thinking for so long. Now I can forget all of this and begin thinking of other things, about my plans. I can begin again.”

I was silent, moved by the eloquence and candor of my friend’s confession.

“Besides, it will only go into your little notebook.”

I did not have anything to write with just then, but Jemusse knew from observing me on his compound (studying me not unlike the anthropologist studying him) that most of what I saw and heard went into the notebook I scribbled in at the end of each day. I asked if it would be okay to write his story down and include it in the book I was going to write. He said it would. In a context where nearly everyone is illiterate—even Pastor Simões weaving Biblical verses into his sermons more from memory than from the text in his hand—it is the spoken word that carries real power. That is why Jemusse felt an urge to verbalize his sentiments to me, using me to relieve himself of the guilt his church had taught him to feel.

Jemusse and Fátima ultimately chose geographic relocation as the solution to their problem. Part of this may owe to my financial intervention. More significant, I contend, is the culturally conditioned predilection for flight over fight, the *habitus* of mobility embodied over the course of their and their ancestors’ historical dealings with precarious circumstances.

Yet crucial to note is that even the option of occult warfare that Jemusse and Fátima briefly entertained also involved a displacement, a violation of their church’s prohibition against ensorcellment, against *returning* to tradition. The argument of this chapter is that this kind of religious mobility is best seen as a variation on the perennial theme of geographic mobility in Makhuwa history, cosmogony, and quotidian life. As numerous stories throughout this



dissertation will attest, there is a general willingness to engage in patterns of egress and regress in and across multiple domains of lived experience. Accompanying such transient acts is no illusion that life will be made easy or problem-free as a result. By migrating to the district capital, Jemusse and Fátima did not see themselves as transcending their problems but simply affording themselves a new terrain on which to confront them. Life is made viable through these small rebirths, these acts of natality, the latest one for Jemusse being that of our conversation that day: his unloading of guilt onto me and my little notebook.

## **TWO**

### **Between the River and the Road**

While Pastor Simões may have disapproved of Jemusse's decision to relocate his family from the countryside to the town, a different set of actors, also headquartered in Maúa's district capital, would have responded much differently. These are the political actors, the district administrators that affiliate today, as the post-independence state always has, with FRELIMO (the Mozambican Liberation Front). Although originally the military opponents of the Portuguese empire, FRELIMO has (from the perspective of many I lived with) only recapitulated earlier colonizers' efforts to rein in the lands and peoples peripheral, if not external, to their jurisdiction. A party whose leadership has long been disproportionately southern, urban, and male, FRELIMO's priorities contrast with those of the predominantly rural and matricentric Makhuwa of northern Mozambique. In this chapter, I explore the efforts of FRELIMO activists to collectivize and sedentarize a population that the administrator of Maúa district plaintively described to me as "too mobile." My argument is that people's resistance to the efforts of political reformers to settle them and set them on a linear path towards "progress" sheds light on their resistance to the efforts of contemporary religious reformers to do the same.

#### **The State against the Peasantry**

The mobility of the Makhuwa runs counter to the administrative logic of their would-be governors. To administer a population it certainly helps to contain and control it. Nomadic, fugitive, and maroon communities have always posed a challenge to state power. During my

time in Kaveya village, I witnessed numerous instances of what Merle Bowen (2000) in her ethnography of peasant communities in southern Mozambique, calls “the state against the peasantry,” a conflict between two ways of being-in-the-world: fixity and containment versus mobility and the refusal to be contained.

Bowen’s work chronicles the failures of both colonial and postcolonial “development” policies to promote economic growth, meet the needs of the peasantry, and grasp the complexities of local conditions. This pattern began when the Portuguese colonial regime obligated peasant populations to cultivate cotton for export. Allen Isaacman (1996) traces the devastating effect of this policy on ordinary Mozambicans, the brutal working conditions this brought upon them. Yet Isaacman also notes stories of flight and sabotage, everyday acts of resistance that allowed peasants to maintain at least partial autonomy amidst such alienating circumstances.

The transition from colonialism to independence did not improve the lives of peasants. In fact, many of FRELIMO’s policies were downright hostile to them. Most notable was the policy of forced villagization, which aimed to concentrate rural populations into “communal villages” ostensibly to collectivize agricultural production for the good of the socialist state, and to expand access to schools, clinics, clean water, and other services (Bowen 2000: 43). Yet behind these laudable objectives lay something decidedly more sordid: the attempt to rein in a recalcitrant population, to bring it under control, to monitor it and render it legible (West 2005: 175-176). Forcing mobile populations into sedentary living conditions has long been a strategy of states. Further, as James Scott (1998: 238) has argued, the *Ujamaa* village program in Tanzania (which served as prototype for FRELIMO) entailed “essentially a point-by-point negation of existing rural practice, which included shifting cultivation and pastoralism; polycropping; living well off

the main roads; kinship and lineage authority; small, scattered settlements with houses built higgledy-piggledy; and production that was dispersed and opaque to the state.” So all-encompassing a negation would explain why Makhuwa elders throughout the district recalled with such sorrow FRELIMO’s villagization efforts. They reported being told how to build their homes and where to place them (within a quadrant, along straight lines). The location was always far from the rivers that provided the fertile land on which subsistence farmers depend. Distance became a problem, therefore, as a vast gulf separated homes from *machambas*. However, the penalty for not permanently withdrawing from the forests was stiff. Mercenaries were sent to capture resisters and raze their homes, and did so in the name of socialist modernization. Of course, residence in the communal village did not last long because soon after relocating there another form of displacement, this time as war refugees, became necessary. It was one year into villagization that RENAMO soldiers entered. Suspensions exist to this day as to whether FRELIMO and RENAMO acted in concert, the former concentrating them for the latter to attack them.

One might suspect that the transition to a market-based economy, following the conclusion of the civil war in 1992, would bring an end to such large-scale social engineering. Such is not the case (Bowen 2000: 185-210). When the war ended the current inhabitants of Kaveya village returned to the countryside: not to the roadside communal villages, but to the rivers from which they were first expelled. Since the mid-2000s, administrators of Maúa district have revived efforts to return people to the roads, the wide, laterite byways on which the district’s few motor vehicles travel. This time, the resettlement efforts are executed in the name of poverty alleviation. More than once in my interviews with the current district administrator in his tile-floored office did he cite his intent to meet the United Nations Millennium Development

Goals. Careful to avoid using the socialist-era language of communal villages, he referred to the project currently underway as one of *agrupamento* or *urbanização*. Though drawn up in the district headquarters with support from the national government, the administrator regularly traveled to the countryside to entice his constituents to unite in roadside residential “blocks.” Always through a translator—not being Makhuwa himself—he promised to those willing to resettle the prospects of a modern, more developed, more urban life.

In the years prior to my fieldwork, and during that year as well, I observed many in fact abiding by the administrator’s desire that they leave the bush for the road. Few, however, did so with anything resembling permanence. The administrator correctly diagnosed what he saw as the problem when he confided to me that the people here are “too mobile,” that they live in “too dispersed” a manner. What frustrated him was that people readily embraced opportunities for rupture, change, and new beginnings, but on terms he found incomprehensible. Rather than replacing their homes in the forest with new ones by the road, they were maintaining two distinct residences many miles apart and circulating between them: rainy seasons far from the road, dry seasons (after harvest) alongside it. From the administrator’s perspective, this multiplicity of residences bespoke an inability to embrace progress, development, and change. From the villagers’ perspective, it granted access to the best of both worlds: the main benefits of the road being schools, water pumps, and vehicular transport to the district hospital; the main benefit of the bush being abundant, fertile land which makes it possible, simply, to eat.

However, it is not every villager who readily embraced the opportunity to move. Many were skeptical, concerned that they were seeing in this *agrupamento* campaign a replay of the compulsory villagization policies of before, afraid that once they gathered along the roadside yet another war would crash upon them. Their driving desire was to remain invisible to the

indomitable forces that had a long history of disrupting their and their forbears' lives. This strategy required distance from the main roads, a strategy diametrically opposed to that of government administrators with "a penchant for locating new villages along the major roads, where they could be most easily reached and monitored" (Scott 1998: 237). Yet while Maúa's district administrator readily admitted he wanted peasants to move to the main road, he never wavered in his insistence that it was only for the sake of better serving them. Further, the contemporary efforts differed from socialist villagization because "today, in the era of democracy, we cannot force people to move against their will."

## **Elephants**

Indeed, coercion is less overt. Yet many do feel themselves being flushed out of their riverside homes to the roads—and even from their roadside villages to the district capital—through the withdrawal of various forms of state support. This is evident with respect to the defunding of health clinics outside the district capital, ones like that which may have been able to save Ekari's life had it not been closed shortly before the fatal snake bite. It is most strikingly evident in the form of elephant invasions. One of the promises made in the early years of the *agrupamento* campaign was protection from elephants who, with increasing frequency, were raiding the crops from which families derived sustenance. As Chief Kaveya, head of Kaveya village, explained, "the government said: 'go to the road and we will make a reserve and the elephants won't invade your land.'" The idea of animal reserves was attractive. These would have created boundaries to keep animals in. Of course, as Mark Dowie (2009) argues, conservation efforts have historically been as much about human eviction as wildlife protection. Nevertheless, the local population

responded enthusiastically to the promise of reserves, along with parallel promises for good schools and improved roadside transport where they were to be resettled.

None of it materialized. “At first, my people were animated for the move [from the bush to the road],” Chief Kaveya said, “but now we feel deceived.” The protection from elephants proved illusory. No reserves were formed and so elephants continued to wander not only in the *machambas* deep in the forest, but up to the roads themselves. This poses a mortal threat, not only to human sustenance—the bananas, beans, and maize that the elephants feed on—but to human bodies as well. On more than one occasion during my stays on the roadside compound of Jemusse and Fatima we were awakened from our sleep by the slow, heavy gait of elephants passing through the woodlands. In contrast with the lumbering elephants, all inhabitants of the surrounding homesteads would wake up panicked, scared for their lives, rushing toward the intruders with fire torches and shrill voices to scare them away. During the harvest season, men could not sleep in their beds. In fact, they rarely slept at all, staying awake in lookout structures built atop the tallest of termite mounds from which their cries of *Itthepo!* (Elephants!) alerted villagers to assume their paltry defenses.

One night, midway into my research year, a man who resided 12 miles up the main road from Kaveya was brutally killed by an elephant. Rare though such an occurrence was, it did not surprise anyone. Villagers were indignant. “We are told that if we cluster our homes together on the roads the elephants won’t attack us, but look at what happened,” the chief of the village where the death occurred told me. In fact, the victim resided on the roadside and died when the elephant he thought he had turned away doubled back. It trampled him underfoot before goring him with his tusks and flinging his dismembered body parts into the forest. His wife faced the unimaginable horror of watching and then waiting for the elephant to retreat so she, along with

other family members, could retrieve the severed limbs and internal organs of the man beside whom she had just been peacefully asleep.

It happened that the governor of Niassa province was to pass through that very village the following week. It was a pre-planned tour through various parts of Maúá district. The village where the death occurred was one of Maúá's largest, meriting an official visit. Yet to the dismay of those who attended, the passing politician said nothing about the attack. He stopped with his entourage, took a few steps from his car, offered greetings, chanted FRELIMO's rallying cry, and delivered a five-minute speech reiterating the district administrator's enticements for resettling. Kicking up dust as his caravan sped away, the governor made haste to the district capital where a large public rally on Independence Plaza awaited him. Villagers in and around Kaveya took this as but the latest example that the government does not care for them. If it did, its leading provincial authority would have stopped long enough to notice them, to hear their suggestions, to take seriously their long-running request for firearms and ammunition. Indeed, during the colonial period, this is how they protected themselves and their fields from elephant invasions.<sup>1</sup>

I asked the district administrator why villagers are not allowed to possess firearms. Would this not help them defend themselves against elephant invasions? He told me that it would do more harm than good. It would threaten public safety to a degree unseen since the civil war, the peaceful transition out of which required a United Nations-led disarmament campaign. It would also, he said, lead to the extinction of elephants. In the name of conservation, a global discourse no less reputable than that of poverty alleviation, he found an unimpeachable defense

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<sup>1</sup> As a result, one man told me, "during the colonial period, the elephants lived far from us. It was possible back then for a child to grow into adulthood without seeing an elephant. Today, a child of only two years will know what an elephant is."



for his agrarian policies.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, he was collecting thousands of dollars-worth of concessions for each hunting license his administration sold to the South African safari hunters, adventurers who consider northern Mozambique's "pristine wildernesses" among the few places left on earth where mega-fauna still roam. I often saw these hunters cheered along by villagers, in Kaveya and elsewhere, whenever they drove by in their Safari Jeeps, welcomed as their best hope for taming the elephant menace. Each elephant these white men killed meant one less threat to lives and livelihoods. It also, of course, meant many weeks' worth of meat. The hunters were gracious enough to leave carcasses behind. Hungry families could then feed themselves off the animals that fed themselves off their crops. Only the tusks were carried away, possibly souvenirs of a successful hunt, possibly revenue generators in the global ivory trade.

In an impassioned letter to Niassa province's Roman Catholic bishop, sent with a request that he convey the message to Niassa's governor, the Makhuwa catechist of a Catholic church in Maúa's second most populated town wrote that he and his neighbors are suffering through Mozambique's third war. The first was waged between FRELIMO and the Portuguese, the second between FRELIMO and RENAMO. The third, now, is the war elephants were waging on them. The historical analogy helps explain why so many find so undesirable the current government's efforts to move them to the roadside. They know the pattern. The war of independence followed Portuguese colonial efforts to restrict mobility through forced cotton cultivation. The civil war followed FRELIMO postcolonial efforts to collectivize agricultural produce and village communities. The contemporary coincidence, therefore, of the "war of elephants" with the district administrator's *agrupamento* campaign leaves people palpably

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<sup>2</sup> The consequences to indigenous Africans of well-intentioned wildlife and nature conservation movements include: "reduced access to ancestral lands, restrictions on customary resource uses, and the predation of wildlife on cultivated lands" (Neumann 1998: 2; quoted in Dowie 2009: xix).

concerned. The preference, as before, remains for mobility, for circulation between the river and the road, between cropfields and settlements.

In defiance of the administrators' urging of a permanent migration, one man voiced the concern of many: "How can I defend my crops at night if I am sleeping by the road?" Though he moved to the road, he did not do so definitively. He circulated regularly between his home near the river and his home on the road. This may have made him, in the eyes of the administrator, "too mobile," but it was a means of survival, one that historical experience had taught him to embrace.

## **Circularity**

Not only do most of those constructing second homes alongside the road refuse to resettle permanently, they also seem little interested in building what government agents and development workers alike call *casas amelhoradas* (literally, "improved homes"): modern constructions using durable materials like kiln-baked bricks and corrugated zinc. Rather, for many, simple mud, bamboo, and thatch constructions known as *pau a pique* (Macaire 1996: 362-365) continue to serve just fine. Of course, such structures easily succumb to the rains and must be abandoned or refurbished every five years. But that may just be the point. Unlike "modern homes," mud huts are easy to construct; and because the sunk-costs of building them are negligible, they are not only quickly built, they are painlessly abandoned: architecture for the fleet-footed.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, whereas modernizing agents see themselves as introducing a solution to

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<sup>3</sup> It may be relevant, on this point, that distinct words, not merely an adjectival qualified, exist in the Makhuwa language to distinguish an abandoned residence or crop field (*mathala*) from a new residence or crop field (*mathatu*). This is just one example of a richer vocabulary in Makhuwa than in European languages for talking about movement, migration, and change.

a problem, those among whom I lived are not accustomed to seeing movement as a problem to be solved. Rather, they consider it wise to follow the example of the turtle, who carries his home on his back. There is no way for him to be robbed and it is never hard for him to pick up and leave.

An episode in my own fieldwork experience illuminated the value of this outlook. Weeks after Jemusse and I completed construction of my and my wife's own *pau a pique*, Jemusse welcomed an acquaintance from Nampula province to also take up residence on his compound. Jemusse made space for him on the dirt floor of the verandah adjacent to Jemusse's home. Apparently he came every year for one month to collect people's surplus maize in exchange for a small amount of cash. He gathered their produce into large sacks that he would later arrange to transport to major cities for resale in the urban market. I did not mind his entrepreneurial motives for being there, but I found myself endlessly irritated by his inability to say a kind word about the people he had come to live among. He regularly referred to the Makhuwa of Niassa province—different from the Makhuwa of coastal Nampula—as weak-willed for not openly protesting the district government's prejudicial policies, as effeminate for persisting in matrilineal residence patterns, and as primitive for not possessing national identification cards. “What would you do if you are stopped by police on the road?” he asked of people who generally chose to stay off policed roads in the first place. He also never missed an opportunity to switch from Makhuwa to Portuguese—a language he seemed exceedingly proud to speak as well as the “white” visitors on Jemusse's compound. My desire to carry out conversations in Makhuwa struck him as laughably childish. But I learned something from my annoyance with this man. I learned just how wrong his criticisms were: mobility is not, as he saw it, a sign of backwardness but an adaptive strategy for dealing with unpredictable, uncontrollable, and undesirable changes. My

wife and I had just laid down roots, of a sort, by asking Jemusse to construct the first home we would ever call our own. Yet no sooner was it built that circumstances changed and we rued the self-inflicted difficulty of moving immediately away.

Beyond their fungibility, the greater significance of mud huts rests in their traditional circularity. Circular structures, particularly the open-air *alpendres*—one of which appears on each family compound, used for feeding guests and seeking refuge from the mid-day sun—are still highly visible throughout the northern Mozambique countryside. Circularity is a salient theme among the Makhuwa. Consider, for example, the rounded peaks of Mount Namuli. This sacred mountain is understood to be replicated by the termite mounds that dot the landscape, the *makeya* offerings of flour poured for ancestors at the base of *mutholo* trees, and curved burial plots. All of these are circular, or at least rounded in shape.<sup>4</sup> Yet today, many homes, particularly the *casas amelhoradas*, are rectilinear. This architectural transformation is not new. As far as two generations back, people began building four-cornered homes because “this is what you [foreigners] came here and taught us,” one elder told me.

Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (1997: 274-322) note that squaring the architectural circle was a crucial aspect of the European civilizing and Christianizing mission, a way of ordering otherwise “savage” domestic space. Yet it would be wrong to see colonial architecture as replacing, wholesale, that which came before. In the villages where I worked, besides the co-presence on a single compound of open-air circular *alpendres* and enclosed rectangular sleeping quarters, even the sleeping quarters displayed a fusion of forms. While their bases and walls were four-cornered, their roofs preserved circularity, the pliable, thatch-supporting bamboo poles

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<sup>4</sup> The importance of feminine fertility, to be discussed in chapter three, and the roundness of the pregnant stomach deserve mention here.

made to curve so as to lend the structure a mounded, Namuli-like, top. What this comingling of shapes demonstrates is a principle of openness to change, but not in a way that completely ruptures with the old. Perhaps nothing represents this principle better than the circle itself. Unlike the rectangle which has a limited number of right-angled corners, the circle requires that every step around it entail a change in direction, but an incremental one (“step-by-step, like the chameleon”). One might say that the circular structures that feature so prominently on the landscape—residential constructions, burial mounds, flour offerings, termite mounds, and, of course, Mount Namuli itself—express this kind of incremental, yet revolutionary, mobility. “Incremental revolutions” describe not only architectural transformations such as those discussed here, but migration patterns such as those discussed throughout this chapter. People are not averse to change and to movement; these have long been approached as unexceptional and reversible, comprising a long history of circular mobility: between the land of the living and the land of the dead, between the countryside and the refugee zone, between the river and the road.

### **Mobile Roots**

Along the same roads to which the district government is promoting resettlement, Pentecostal churches are steadily appearing. The one in Kaveya village where Jemusse held a leadership position is but one example. This coincidence makes sense for a number of reasons. According to the district administrator, while the official policy of the Mozambican state is one of secularism, the pluralization of religious options is a positive boon for the populace. This openness stands in stark contrast with FRELIMO’s earlier hostility toward both organized and indigenous religious institutions and practices. Its fight against the Catholic Church and “obscurantism” was inspired by the Marxist-Leninist ideology that considered religion antithetical to progress (Morier-Genoud 1996). With the disavowal of socialism that

accompanied the collapse of the Soviet Union and Mozambique's transition to democracy, a tolerance for and even encouragement of new religious movements became state policy. It is in this context that many new Pentecostal churches entered the country. These churches were not only welcomed, they were offered incentives and degrees of state support (Freston 2005: 55, Cruz e Silva 2008). Thus, although the administrator of Maúa district (himself a Muslim) did not convey any particular enthusiasm for Pentecostal churches establishing operations in his jurisdiction, he did tell me he appreciated their contributions to the development of the very roadside settlements he was hoping would flourish. One FRELIMO party member, a sub-chief in one of the more rapidly developing *agrupamentos*, remarked that he would like to welcome Pentecostal leaders because they typically build their churches in the style of a *casa amelhorada* with bricks and a zinc roof. This, he imagined, would inspire the Catholic chapel and Islamic mosque already present along the road to upgrade from mud and thatch. "People will say that we are developing because our buildings have zinc roofs." He was proud of the signs of "development" already underway: new snack stalls, carpentry shacks, and even one pension to serve passing truckers. The appearance of new churches, particularly the more "modern" transnational Pentecostal churches, would only further the development already underway.

There is another level of consonance between the government's project of conglomerating populations along roadsides and the Pentecostal project of attracting people to its churches. Despite their common rhetoric of change, both are in fact interested in making people more settled or sedentary than they have customarily been. We have already seen this in the district administrator's lament that people have a habit of being "too mobile."<sup>5</sup> In numerous

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<sup>5</sup> FRELIMO's rhetoric of "mobilizing" the population, a phrase used throughout most of its history, has therefore a certain ironic ring to it.

sermons I heard, Pentecostal preachers likewise communicated their frustration with the ways in which people seem incapable of settling permanently on one religious identity or set of practices. Ordinary villagers are not averse to these contemporary forms of change. Many migrate, and among those who do, many convert. (Tellingly, the Makhuwa verb *othama* is used for both processes.) However, to the consternation of Pentecostal evangelists no less than of government agents, few make either move with any sense of permanence. Many who enter the churches continue sacrificing to the *minepa* just as many who relocate to the main road continue cultivating far from it.

Pastor Simões, Maúa's district-level pastor of the Assembly of God African (*Assembléia de Deus Africana*, hereafter ADA) church, once spoke with me about what he took to be a constitutional defect of "us black people" as opposed to "you white people." The defect is an inability to settle or remain fixed, whether in a particular place or in a particular church. As discussed in chapter one, he viewed Jemusse's and Fatima's decision to relocate to the district capital (rather than remain in their village to combat the demonic forces that took their child) as indicative of a larger problem. Unlike in more urban settings of northern Mozambique where Pastor Simões has also ministered:

Here things are different. People abandon their homes, even new homes, go to another place, construct again. The government builds schools and people still leave for other places. This does not help. It's so much better for a person to organize his life in a single place, build a modern home [*casa amelhorada*], dig a good latrine, plant an orange tree, whatever. '*Pronto*. Here we will remain, here itself.'

This is the same ideal expressed by Maúa's district administrator. Where Pastor Simões went beyond was in connecting the problem of geographic nomadism to the "backsliding" he

constantly had to police in the district's ADA churches.<sup>6</sup> Even those who seem to participate fervently and faithfully have a habit, he admitted, of continuing to consult with diviners, procure remedies from traditional healers, and offer *makeya* sacrifices to ancestors.

“The problem is that people here are too rooted [Portuguese: *enraizado*] in tradition,” Pastor Simões told me one day. The word choice is suggestive, for if there is one thing I learned in my first days of fieldwork, it is the importance of roots. Literally. Roots are essential components of the medicines prepared by healers, and root crops—cassava or manioc, especially—are the most common gifts with which strangers are sent off at the end of a visit. They are also a prime nutritional source for people who prize their mobility. Scott (2009: 195-196) describes manioc, yams, and potatoes as the ultimate “escape” crops. Unlike grains, they grow underground, invisible to tax collectors; and they can remain safely there for up to two years, to be dug up piecemeal as needed. They are illegible to state powers, just as the people who grow them aspire to be.

It was in conversation with Paulino, one of my research assistants, that I learned these features of roots. Sensing that Paulino had more to say, I pressed the discussion in a direction I hoped would shed light on the pastor's lament.

“But what is it that roots us?” I asked. “Do we need to be rooted the way trees and plants do?”

“Of course,” he replied without a pause, “which is why we also have roots!”

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<sup>6</sup> While some scholars of Pentecostalism might take his insistence on rupture from such “traditional” ways as evidence for the salience of discontinuity among Pentecostals (Robbins 2007, Marshall 2009), one might also arrive at the precise opposite conclusion: that the regularity of such entreaties shows that continuities remain. Everyday practice cannot be assumed to follow the rhetoric of church officials, but church leaders' emphasis on this “problem” can be diagnostic, suggestive of what even they know people to actually do.



He grabbed his forearm and I looked at him quizzically.

“Here,” he said, pointing to his veins. “These are our roots.”

In the Makhuwa dialect of Maúa district, while there is a word for veins (*misempha*), these are described as performing the function of roots (*mikakari*). Of course, in the way westerners tend to speak of roots,<sup>7</sup> veins are decidedly not roots: my veins run through my body, but they do not anchor it to the ground. Yet in another respect, recognized in the Makhuwa metaphor, our veins do exactly what the roots of a plant do. They are the channels through which flow the sources of our vitality: lifeblood for us, soil nutrients for plants.

Continuing his lesson, Paulino said: “Our veins/roots [*mikakari sahu*] make our blood to circulate.”

Then, dramatically bounding to his feet: “And that makes *us* to circulate!”

As discussed in the introduction and as will be further documented throughout this dissertation, at issue for the Pentecostal churches I observed in Niassa province is not that people do not attend, but that they selectively attend. They move into the new churches, but they also move out, and when situations change and new needs arise they move back in. If they do this because they are too “rooted” in tradition, it is not in Pastor Simões’ sense of roots that fix but in Paulino’s sense of roots that mobilize.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See, for example, the common invocation of the “roots” metaphor by African-American intellectuals ranging from Alex Haley (1976) to Henry Louis Gates (2009). Given the Makhuwa interpretation of “roots” to be elaborated here, there is a certain irony in the search for genealogical “roots” in the African continent where “rootedness” may not in all cases matter in quite the same way. Among peripheral, acephalous groups throughout the world, the deliberate disavowal of historical genealogies has sometimes served as a strategy for evading state and bureaucratic control (Scott 2009: 234-237).

<sup>8</sup> It is worth noting, along these lines, that the sacred *mutholo* tree, despite being rooted in the soil, was always carried along with the Makhuwa in every one of the episodes of flight described above. Even if the fleeing needed to happen immediately, to escape the real possibility of massacre during the civil war, for example, two or three men

## Life within Limits

Before concluding this two-chapter consideration of conversion as a form of movement, a caveat is in order: one must not overstate and overly romanticize mobility among the Makhuwa. In the first place, not everyone moves, at least not physically; likewise, even with the proliferation of new religious options, not everyone converts. I came to know Diniz, a sugar cane harvester in a village near Kaveya, after word got around that the very night he made an offering of maize beer (*otheka*) to his ancestors, elephants got to his crops. I immediately sought out this unfortunate man and, after commiserating with him over his loss, asked if the inability of his ancestors to protect his crops means that the elephants are stronger than the ancestors. He said yes. I asked him how he can resolve that problem and he restated what I often heard, that the only solution is firearms. Unfortunately, this is expressly the solution banned by the district government.

“So what can you do now?” I asked.

“I am planting for next season. I don’t stop. Each moment I have to plant,” he said.

Seeing if I could press him in the direction my research thus far was suggesting, I asked him about moving. Could he not move to a different locale? He said no, “elephants are in every corner.” But even if physical mobility was not viable, was not imaginative mobility? Could he not move to a different religion, take his pleas for protection to powers other than his ancestors?

“I haven’t thought of changing religion, or location,” he said. “Now it’s just doing many crop fields [*imatta*]. A person cannot trust [*ororomela*] in just one thing. At the river, I will try

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would always return to the home when safe to do so, cut off one of the branches of the *mutholo* tree and carry it to their new habitation. There, a new *mutholo* tree was found and the old branch laid against it, left to dry, and thereby become one with the new tree. This trans-plantation was understood as the way to ensure that the ancestors, whose *makeya* offerings were always left under the *mutholo* tree, would follow a community to its new habitation.

sugar canes again, here [where we were sitting, at his compound], I will produce cotton. I can't trust in the river alone. One of the things will pay off."

I was impressed with Diniz's resolve to polycrop, finding his statement that "a person cannot trust in one thing" consistent with the experimentalism I had seen elsewhere. Nevertheless, I wondered why this did not impel him to think more ambitiously, to experiment more expansively. The interventionist in me found his answer unsatisfying. How would simply diversifying his cash crops protect him from the elephants? And if it is true that one cannot trust in only one crop, then why trust in only the ancestors? Why trust in only this place?

"We will stay here. We see no place to go. There is no place without elephants. There is no other possibility."

"But how can you say there is no other possibility?" I insisted. Then, failing perhaps to keep my growing frustration properly in check, I added, "If the elephants keep invading your crops, your children will die of hunger."

"Then I and my children will die of hunger," he said. As if to mock my evident desperation for something more, he said it with a smile.

I was floored. His response conveyed an attitude of resignation that I found hard to accept. It stood in contrast to evidence I found elsewhere of people courageous and pragmatic enough to flee, to find new lands, to pursue spiritual alternatives. An argument could be made that times are changing, that unlike in the past when governing powers did not control the peripheries of rural land, there is today an increasing parceling of all land, a closing off of the

frontier.<sup>9</sup> In a region like southern Niassa, so rich in mega-fauna, one notes the increasing allotment of land for elephants by political powers eager to attract deep-pocketed game hunters. In such a situation, elephants have, indeed, come to roam more freely, and the option people used to rely on—of simply getting up and leaving to where elephants are not—is increasingly foreclosed. At the same time, however, evidence from throughout Africa suggests something quite different, that what is unique about the contemporary age is not the expansion but contraction of state sovereignty, and the rise in its wake of such exit strategies as Pentecostal conversion and long-distance migration (Piot 2010). Those migrations are increasingly international, or to domestic towns and cities that, surely Diniz knew, are safe from elephant invasions. Why, then, I struggled to understand, could Diniz not change religion or change location in response to his hardships?

An answer came to me when I learned the Makhuwa word *erima*, notable for its double meaning: patience, but also courage. Patience to accept the limits of one's control suggests something less active and agentive than flight, certainly less so than fight. But was there not also courage in Diniz's patience, his persistence in doing what he knew to do, in maintaining his faith in the ancestors despite doubts about their powers and his practice of agriculture despite concerns about its viability? Moreover, his agricultural practice of polycropping suggested the kind of bounded freedom Michel de Certeau theorized through his concept of tactics, those everyday practices that express the refusal of actors to be defined or identified by circumstances upon which they are nevertheless dependent. De Certeau (1984: 30) may have been writing of Diniz when he elaborated the concept thus: "Without leaving the place where he has no choice but to

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<sup>9</sup> Scott observes this in his study of non-state spaces in southeast Asia that such developments as all-weather roads and modern information technologies have enabled political states and capital markets to extend their sovereignty almost infinitely, to achieve something close to a "final enclosure" (Scott 2009: 10-11).

live and which lays down its law for him, he establishes within it a degree of *plurality* and creativity.” In his own tactics, in his micro-maneuvers, Diniz seemed to find a means of turning that which could not be radically changed into that which could be meaningfully endured. Perhaps, after all, changing one’s viewpoint need not require changing one’s standpoint.

Yet even for those who did move around regularly and unproblematically, as many seemed to do, it is of crucial importance that it was not “transcendence” of their situation that they sought, nor a linear rupture from their past. Though transcendence is a primary trope in Christian thought and practice (Cannell 2006), something quite different appears to be at stake for the Makhuwa, even for Makhuwa Christians. Their movements are less about escaping what came prior, as if moving into an unsullied, context-free zone, than about displacing what came prior. Moving from one place to another or one religion to another does not remove one from the hurly-burly of life. “Leaving this place behind is not leaving death behind because every place has death,” Chief Kaveya once told me. I took his words as an expression of the realism born from living in a region of limited resources and scarce opportunities.<sup>10</sup> To the extent that the tendency toward mobility persists in spite of this realism, it takes less the form of a transcendent withdrawal to an overarching vantage point than what Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1964: 119) calls a “lateral displacement.” The frequency of movement, the temporariness of settlement, and the refusal of permanence are warranted because *no one* geographic location or religious tradition can remove one from the human condition. The goal in *othama* (migration / conversion), then, is less that of obtaining immortality than of obtaining a fresh start, of carrying on in spite of the absurdity of a life where death lurks, like elephants, “in every corner.” The Makhuwa of Maúa

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<sup>10</sup> Even death itself is not a complete escape from the human condition since, as we have seen, *minepa* remain hungry and dependent on the goodwill of the living.

district convey a certain reconciliation to life's hardship, brooking no illusion of rupture from the human condition. This is starkly clear in people like Diniz, in his stoical acceptance of life's limitations and efforts to maneuver within them. Yet even for those who revolt through escape—through migration or through conversion—they do so, one might say, more in the manner of Sisyphus (Camus 1955) than of Icarus: fully attuned to how modest, momentary, and therefore multiple such revolts must be.

**PART II**

***OHIYA NI OVOLOWA*—TO LEAVE AND TO ENTER**

### THREE

#### Border Crossings

The argument developed so far is for seeing religious conversion, among the Makhuwa, as a spatial practice. In contrast to introspective conceptions of conversion presupposed in certain strands of western Christianity, conversion among the Makhuwa is less a matter of the heart's transformation than the body's transportation. If the alternative to *opittikuxa murima* ("change of heart") was *othama* ("to move") in part one of this dissertation, in part two it is another phrase commonly used to speak about conversion: *ohiya ettini ekina, orowa ettini ekina* ("to leave one religion and enter another"). The *ohiya ni ovolowa* (leave and enter) dynamic applies to many mundane matters: leaving the village and entering the bush, abandoning a depleted crop field and rotating to a fresh one, and (in reverse) entering and leaving the space-time of rituals.<sup>1</sup> The initiation ritual, as one such ritual, illustrates clearly how perennial are patterns of motion, but how these are predicated on bordered spaces and bounded territories. Mobility entails leaving and entering, crossing and dwelling, periods of motion alternating with periods of stasis. This carries implications for how religions are experienced, at least to the extent they too are conceived as bounded entities. Those implications will be addressed in chapter four, but to understand how boundaries function between "Christianity" and what has come to be called "the religion of our ancestors" (*ettini ya makholo*) it behooves us first to explore the role of boundaries in the latter.

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<sup>1</sup> Rather than saying "the ceremony will take place all night," for example, much more commonly said is "we enter (*ovolowa*) tonight and leave (*ohiya*) tomorrow."



## Florêncio

Rituals of initiation into adulthood reach back to the time of the ancestors, say Makhuwa elders. Even when outlawed by the post-independence Frelimo government in its campaign against “obscurantism,” these rituals took place, only surreptitiously and for shorter periods of time. Largely because of the decades of prohibition, the ritual has lost significance among some, the transition to adulthood nowadays occurring less in the bush than in the classroom. Many expressed to me disappointment that village chiefs were no longer exerting themselves to organize the ceremonies as they used to. So when, in 2009, Chief Kaveya organized a male initiation ceremony (*olukhu*), older men and women embraced the first opportunity in many years to put their progeny through what had been so crucial to their own formation.

One of the boys participating that year, Florêncio, was actually an older adolescent. The nephew of a village counselor (*namiruku*), Florêncio had found his way into Kaveya’s Assembly of God African (*Assembléia de Deus Africana*, hereafter ADA) congregation while still a child. He was following age mates into the small Pentecostal congregation but soon became so involved that he earned the title of *maestro*, responsible for leading the dances and music of worship services. By the time I met him, three years later, he was no longer attending the church. Nevertheless, he remained proud of what he did there, eager to tell me about *kwaya* and other choreographies he arranged, many of which were still observable in worship services even though he no longer was.

To participate in Chief Kaveya’s initiation ceremony, Florêncio had strong support from his uncle, but just the opposite from his church. The ADA prohibited its members from undergoing or sending their children to undergo initiation rituals, sporadically organized though they had become. The ADA did not, however, object to male circumcision. When done in

biomedical facilities by physicians, serving exclusively medical purposes, this was acceptable. The church in fact encouraged it as a substitute for the bush ceremony and all that happened there: ancestral teachings, sacrificial offerings, consumption of traditional medicines.

“I was in Cuamba that year, helping my father sell tobacco,” Florêncio recalled for me. “When I returned, I heard that others in the church had gone to the hospital, finished it off, so the only option for me was to do it here, by the Nakukula River. I tried to do it secretly. Only Mamá and Papá knew. The church, no.”

Yet Florêncio did involve the church in other ways. Two other ranking members—Jemusse and Abílio—accompanied him. They had already undergone the hospital circumcision but wanted to be with their spiritual brother at this pivotal moment in his life. Additionally, the three of them carried off the church’s *nlapa* drum. Since this initiation ceremony was to last less than one week, they thought they could get away with pinching the drum, making sure to return it before the church elder could know it had gone with them into the bush.

They were not so lucky. The church elder got wind and immediately reported it to Maúa’s district pastor, Pastor Simões’ predecessor. Shortly after the ceremony ended, the pastor arrived and issued all three young men with a reprimand, the church’s standard punishment for behavioral violations. The reprimand was set for two months, during which the young men were expected to attend services but without participating as all members—men and women, young and old—do. No singing, no clapping, no preaching, no dancing. They must only sit quietly, hear the word of God, and reflect upon their wrongdoing, a particularly severe punishment for Florêncio, accustomed as *maestro* not only to enjoying but to generating the exhilarating worship experience.

In discussing this episode with Florêncio, we broached the possibility that was then before him of leaving the church altogether.

“My uncle told me to,” he said. “But me? No way. I said to myself that I will withstand [*suportar*] the reprimand for two months.”

“Was it difficult to withstand?”

“It was very difficult, because we had to arrive on Sundays and just sit there, silent, until the end of the service, every Sunday like that.”

“Was it correct to receive that punishment?”

“Yes, it was correct, but it was worth it. Two months of church reprimand was hard, but after a week in the bush it wasn’t that bad.”

He ticked off all the ordeals suffered on the initiation grounds: being circumcised, receiving lashings, sleeping naked, eating unsalted dishes. Yet as undesired as all of that was, he also acknowledged benefits. Besides the camaraderie with his fellow neophytes, the entrée into Makhuwa personhood, and the acquisition of ancestral wisdom, Florêncio was also able to cultivate such virtues as *erima*, the Makhuwa word for both patience and courage. The ability to withstand hardship with *erima* had immediate applicability: it helped him manage the punishment awaiting him from his church.

“In the end, the reprimand was nothing,” he said. “It was just arriving at church and staying seated and quiet. No one was beating us. And anyway, after those two months, we could return to playing the drums and return to singing.”

Evident in Florêncio's participation in the village initiation ceremony is the same ease with mobility and multiplicity seen earlier in Jemusse's and Fátima's response of migration—across spaces and across traditions—to the death of their daughter. That mobility is key to understanding religious conversion among the Makhuwa has already been argued with reference to indigenous cosmologies, concepts, and histories. It would be easy to come away from those examples with the impression that, for those I worked with, it is mobility all the way down, that fluidity exists without friction, breeziness without borders.

Undoubtedly, the vogue of flux in contemporary theory—the sense of what Edward Said (1979: 18) has called “a generalized condition of homelessness” stemming from global migration patterns (see also Gupta and Ferguson 1992 and Appadurai 1996)—would offer solid theoretical ground for making mobility the final word, for coming to rest in the phenomenon of flux. The only constant is change, says a line of thinkers stretching from Heraclitus to Henri Bergson to Gilles Deleuze (see Deleuze 1983 and Deleuze 1988); and there is no doubt much value in this perspective. “The essence of life is its continually changing character,” contends William James (1909: 253) in his appreciative essay on Bergson. Yet is that always necessarily how life is experienced? In the contemporary, hyper-mobile world, heavily policed border regimes have only expanded and fortified their apparatuses of control and regulation. One sees this in southern Africa as much as anywhere. The geopolitics of exclusion reminds us that care must be taken not to overstate or unduly romanticize fluidity and flux.<sup>2</sup> James provides resources for understanding this philosophically, radicalizing Bergson's empiricism by noting that time is not always and only sensed as flowing; it also “comes in drops” (1909: 232). Discrete moments sometimes

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<sup>2</sup> This is Manuel Vasquez's (2009) primary critique of Thomas Tweed's *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* (2006). See also Brown 2010.

matter, and the intellect is as much (and as little) constitutive of lived experience as is intuition. This insight allows James to attend equally to continuities and discontinuities, conjunctions and disjunctions. The stream of consciousness, he writes, is “like a bird’s life... made of an alternation of flights and perchings” (James 1950: 243). James’ warning is against over-privileging free-flowing flux, lest we make of multiplicity the very singularity that would be undone (Game 1997).

### **A Rite of Passages**

In *Les Rites de Passage* (originally published in 1909), Arnold van Gennep set the course for initiation studies by documenting the ritual’s tripartite structure, comprising separation, transition, and incorporation (van Gennep 1960: 21). The most famous exposition of this process in the African context is Victor Turner’s work on Ndembu male initiation. In one summation, Turner writes, “the boys are removed from their homes in the villages, circumcised, secluded for a period during which they are subject to special rules and interdictions, and returned to their villages as men” (Turner 1962: 124). The purpose and trajectory of the sequence, from separation to incorporation, from removal to return, is the transformation of boys into men. It is this passage, referred to in the phrase “rites of passage,” that is the overarching focus of scholarship on initiation.

The transformation itself—most dramatically the circumcision operation—transpires in the liminal phase, the second and, for Turner (1967: 93-111; 1969: 94-130), most crucial phase of the ritual process. Its features are fluidity and instability, the suspension of structures and boundaries, and the amorphousness of the transitional entities. Given its inherent ambiguities,

there is a certain irony in the impression Turner gives of liminality as unified and coherent. Temporally, the liminal period is broken into different events (Turner 1967: 224), yet little sense is given of these events transpiring in different locales. In a sentence whose main purpose is to describe the role of the novice's guardian, for example, Turner notes it is he "who carries the novice from the circumcision site to the *ifwilu* or 'site of dying,' where the novice sits until his wound stops bleeding" (Turner 1967: 194). Of the next locational shift, from the *ifwilu* to the seclusion lodge, Turner has nothing to note beyond, "The lodge was built immediately in front of the dying-place which it concealed from the view of anyone going along the old path" (Turner 1967: 224). Concealed from readers' view is any sense of neophytes going along any paths whatsoever (unless carried). Perhaps, in the Ndembu context, they simply did not. It is also possible that Turner's failure to remark in any detail on differentiated sites or the nature of movements between them reflects his own theoretical concern to explicate (if not celebrate) liminality as anti-structure, a place free of the distinctions marking quotidian social life. As a zone "betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial" (Turner 1969: 95), the liminal zone is important precisely because of its indeterminacy, a most fitting setting for the equally indeterminate beings—not still boys and not yet men—passing through it.

Since the work of Turner and others in the 1960s and 1970s, anthropological studies of initiation have largely fallen out of fashion. This may owe, sensibly enough, to the ritual's largely diminished presence and salience throughout the world, in Africa as elsewhere. In Maúa,

however, as late as 2012, a male initiation rite took place over two weeks, during the school vacation period of the dry season. I was privileged to be invited to attend.<sup>3</sup>

It was a chilly start to the day. Thirty six boys gathered, each standing beside his guardian (an older male relative), in Maúa district's Catholic parish church. Father Giuseppe Frizzi, the elder Makhuwa-speaking Italian priest who has lived and worked in the region since the 1970s, led all gathered in a mass. Prayers to God and Jesus, Mary and the saints, officially opened the initiation period, just as they have every year since 1989. That is when the FRELIMO government, hitherto guided by ideals of socialist modernization, softened its opposition to initiation rituals and other forms of "obscurantism," an opening Father Frizzi took as an opportunity "to resurrect" the initiation rituals that had become nearly obsolete. Frizzi insisted on the rite proceeding collaboratively, involving both Makhuwa catechists of the Catholic church and Makhuwa ritual leaders, which is why when the mass ended, the boys and their guardians, along with the boys' mothers and other kin, processed from the compound of the church to that of the region's paramount chief (*regulo*), just on the outskirts of town.

There a *makeya* offering took place, though not at the base of the *mutholo* tree, as usual, but atop the shaved heads of the initiates. The millet flour formed into the shape of a mound atop their heads—a simulacrum of Mount Namuli—and white particles sprinkled down onto their bare chests. The neophytes stood still throughout, even when the adults around them broke into dance. Later came the departure for the bush, the setting of initiation rites' liminal phase, but so much besides: a place of regenerative powers but also of unpredictable dangers. Before entering the bush one must plead with one's ancestors to "open the path": hence, the *makeya* ceremony

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<sup>3</sup> The following analysis is of a male initiation ceremony only. Because of my gender, the nearly simultaneous girls' initiation of 2012 was off limits to me. What follows therefore is partial, yet revelatory insofar as consistent with Makhuwa principles explored elsewhere in this dissertation.

just prior to their move into the bush. The boys walked the entire time in silence and with heads reverentially bowed. Even those adults previously boisterous under the influence of maize beer sobered up for this boundary crossing, mindful that (as one Makuwa proverb has it), “The bush is not small. Small is the one who walks in it.” For the initiates, this transition from town to bush, from familiar domesticity to wild antinomianism, was the first important boundary-crossing of many to come.

The first encampment, called *nipantta*, was a clearing around a *mutholo* tree, one quarter mile from a small stream where the next day’s circumcision operation would occur. We arrived at *nipantta* in the late afternoon, and after setting up fires, reed mats, and cooking vats, the festivities resumed. *Ntotonto* and other dances associated with initiation carried on through the evening and into the night. Beer was consumed liberally, passed around in calabash bowls. All of this, again, was for the men and women gathered. The boys sat in a circle around the fire, encircling the dancers who sang and laughed and role-played, but comporting themselves in a polar opposite manner. For long hours, they sat with legs extended, straight-faced and straight-backed, looking down and somehow blocking out the vigorous activities, movements, and noises around them. The principle was already set. There will be continual motion throughout the ritual, if not by the initiates themselves then certainly by the adults gathered around them. Yet the boys had to behave stoically—with equanimity, patience, and poise—somehow resisting the Dionysian dynamics around them. The remaining days would repeatedly reprise this juxtaposition of mobility and stasis.

At no moment was forbearance more called for and more tested than at what followed the next afternoon: the circumcision. There was still much that led up to that climactic moment. Coordinating it all was Kayaya (whose name means bush spirit). Just before the circumcision, he



gathered the neophytes again into a circle around the *mutholo* tree. Seated on the ground they were hand-fed a special dish that mixed pieces of chicken meat with ingredients I observed him earlier pounding in a mortar, medication that gives “forces to procreate.” Along with the feeding came speeches, from Kayaya but also from the paramount chief and other elders, on the significance of the transformation about to happen. As responsible adult members, those now undergoing the rite will be fit to fit to bring new life into the world and help the deceased transition out of it. They must also practice respect (*nttittimiho*) at all times toward their parents and their elders, never fail to visit the infirm or to attend funerals of the deceased. Kayaya also proffered special instructions for the mothers who remained present through this second day. Until the circumcision wounds heal, the mothers must abide by strict taboos: no salt in their cooking, no bathing, and no sexual intercourse. Returning to the boys, he instructed them on the impending procedure: that their eyes would be closed and that they would be led by their guardians to the stream downhill to the *murattho* site where the operation would occur; and that after the cut occurred, they would be led across the stream and up the other embankment to yet another site where they would remain until the bleeding stopped. He stressed that in moving there they should do so calmly. “Don’t run. If you do, you will worsen the wound,” he said. The transformation to manhood would be climactic but nonetheless measured in tempo.

Each guardian then led his neophyte away from the *nipantta* clearing, mothers yelling out ebulliently, and the proceedings shifted down the hill toward the stream. Now in a single file, the initiates were told to strip off their shorts. Drums began pounding, frenetically, at the head of the line where the circumciser was kneeling on the ground. The Catholic church catechist knelt beside the circumciser, a bag full of individually wrapped razor blades in hand. One step at a time, each novice approached the circumciser. His eyes covered by his guardian, he was likely

clueless as to whether his turn was next but surely attentive to the drums' increasing volume with every step forward. He knew it was his turn when another ritual assistant grabbed his legs and dropped him onto his back. The guardians tried to soften the fall even while keeping their hands over the boys' eyes. The catechist handed a newly-unpackaged razor to the circumciser, and within a matter of seconds the initiate was yanked back to his feet, led over the small stream, and guided up the opposite embankment to the next site, called *namuhakwa*.

When all 36 had been cut, the circumciser's aide returned to the mothers to relate the news that their sons were now men. Ululations resounded as far away as the stream where I was standing. The mothers could now return home, not to see their sons until their return from the bush. The action was now at the *namuhakwa* site. Surely in pain from the cut, the boys sat in a dirt clearing, their knees bent to keep their penises off the ground. The guardians stomped in front of them, kicking up clouds of dust while chanting, "The vagina has opened! The vagina has opened!" The dust's astringent properties served to bring the bleeding under control, to bring to cessation the flow of blood.

After an hour or so at the *namuhakwa* site came yet another decampment, this time to a site requiring nearly a half hour walk through dense woodlands. Beside a river, this site was referred to as the *nvera*, also the word for the seclusion lodge which the guardians were tasked with erecting there. With their machetes and hoes, they first cleared a large patch of ground, removing saplings, twigs, grass, and leaves. Everyone except Kayaya then left. He, as master of ceremonies, dug a hole in the middle of the clearing into which he inserted secret ingredients. In response to my curiosity about the contents, all I was told is that that they would have the same fortifying effects as the medicines fed to the neophytes earlier. He also planted the two center posts of the lodge. Two types of wood, *mpila* and *musululu*, these represented man and woman;

they were chosen, Kayaya told me, because “the children here were born through the couple, the father and mother.” Now was the time for their second birth.

The longhouse lodge was constructed of chopped tree limbs with bundles of thatch laid upon its roof and draped along its sides. The only two openings were in the middle of the long side walls. Bisecting the hut’s interior was a *khanyipu* tree log, called the *ekuluwe* (wild pig). Initiates were under strict instruction to treat this as a dividing line. Until their wounds fully cicatrized, they were to confine themselves to only one side of the *ekuluwe*: the same side from which they entered this encampment. During the time it would take the scars to heal, they would only play and at night sleep—shoulder to shoulder, horizontally—on that side of the *ekuluwe*.

On the third evening, the catechist, who with a small medical kit in hand monitored each boy’s healing, declared the time ready for the next set of ceremonial activities. At sunrise the next day, the initiates lined up outside the primary entrance of the lodge. They were then ordered to rush into it, which they did one at a time. As each entered, his guardian handed him a spear (*nivaka*) carved from bamboo by the guardian in the preceding days. Inside the lodge, spear in hand, the initiate stabbed the *ekuluwe* log, then for the first time crossed that limit and exited the opposite passageway. He then ran down the short path straight into the river. The “slaying of the wild pig” and the ensuing purification bath were symbolically significant. According to T.O. Beidelman, who observed the wild pig ritual in Ngulu initiation (Tanzania), the symbolic hunt both represents sexual congress, which the entire initiation procedure prepares neophytes for, and epitomizes male control over the disorderliness of femininity and the destructiveness of invasive fauna (Beidelman 1964: 371). In the Makhuwa case, it also serves as a border drawn for demarcating distinct zones, and then ritualizing its crossing. The bath, the first since the entire ceremony began, expresses its recurring theme of rebirth into a new life. The 36 neophytes stood

in the river, shivering from the early morning temperatures but basking in the cheers of the guardians at the riverbank. The guardians began egging the boys on, urging them to brave the frigidness of the water and plunge headfirst. When the first one did so, the guardians howled with laughter, thus motivating the others to dive in as well. When they climbed out, they were met with sheets and shorts which, for the first time in three days, they were permitted to wear. The guardians then led their charges to the fire pits—built like bonfires this morning—to warm their bodies. From this point on, the initiates would only play and sleep on the riverside of the lodge. It is also on that side of the *ekuluwe* log where they would receive the wisdom teachings that would occupy the remaining days at the *nvera* site—Catholic teachings every morning and ancestral teachings every night.

The instructional period lasted five days, after which yet another locational shift occurred. The *nvera* site was abandoned. In fact, the *nvera* was burned. It was set ablaze by the master of ceremonies who yelled out *Muthuko moro! Muthuko moro!* (Fire torch! Fire torch!) as he walked around the perimeter of the lodge touching his flame to the highly flammable thatch. It was the task of the boys, standing at the site just outside the lodge, to run as soon as the fire began and not look back. The penalty for seeing the burning lodge, the flames of which shot as high as tree tops, was grave misfortune (cf. Turner 1967: 256). Almost as speedily as the lodge was constructed, it was destroyed, yet another testament to the regularity and rapidity of changes throughout the initiation rite. The initiates with their guardians were back on a footpath to a location near the first sites from over nearly two weeks ago. A loop back to town was being traced. It was at this final site, called *mpandamo*, that another set of rituals would be performed before reentry into town. Most important here was the delivery of the *moroxoxo* by the guardians to each initiate. This multi-colored staff, around three feet tall, would stand in as a deceased

person. One week following the initiation, the newly emerged men would bury the *moroxoxo* and be prepared by that act to conduct proper burials. They learned through this, in other words, to recognize and respect the all-important boundary between the living and the dead.

The following day, the boundary between bush and town was finally re-traversed. The neophytes were covered up by tall sheaves of grass, unable to see or be seen. This scarcely reduced the jubilation of their expectant mothers, who greeted the procession at a major crossroad into town, at precisely the hour of dusk. From that liminal place at that liminal hour, the procession continued, with singing and dancing, to the paramount chief's compound, where the final, all-night session of ancestral teachings ("strong" teachings, this time, I was told) would take place. The initiates were exhausted, and so had to be forced to keep awake, one man walking around the circle with a calabash bowl of water to splash anyone seen dozing off. The following morning, Sunday morning, the newborn men were led to a river in town where they took their final baths and donned the nicest clothes their relatives could afford. Some were given new shoes. Along with the female initiates whose own (shorter) rite was timed to end the same day, they were honored at that morning's Catholic mass—an especially celebratory one—as new, adult members of the community.

The preceding details reveal how space matters in the most ritualized of human transformations. Whether from the grounds of the Catholic church to the grounds of the paramount chief, from the town to the bush, from one encampment to another, or from the near side to the far side of the *ekuluwe* log, one cannot miss the crucial significance of differentiated zones. Initiation studies in the tradition of van Gennep and Turner clearly demarcate the zone of normativity from that of liminality. Yet, for the Makhuwa, it is not only the border between

structure and anti-structure that matters. Betwixt and between there are many more betwixts and between. The rite of passage is more properly a rite of passages.

### **A Rite of Return**

It is also a rite of return. Vincent Crapanzano (1981) used this phrase to characterize the male circumcision rite of Moroccan Arabs. In the rites he observed, Crapanzano found the idea of passage, of a unilinear movement from dependence to adulthood, to be illusory. After being taken from their mothers and paraded to the local mosque or saint's sanctuary, initiates are returned home where the operation itself occurs. Following the circumcision, the initiate is swaddled in cloth, placed on his dancing mother's back until he stops crying, and then has his wound tended to by the gathered women. Given the "intensely feminine atmosphere" (Crapanzano 1981: 127) of the rite, Crapanzano claims it does more to renew than to sever the pre-existing maternal bond. The contrast with most other African initiation rites is striking. Following van Gennep's paradigm, these emphasize what Beidelman (1965:145) calls the "journey" from childhood to adulthood. In this section, I present evidence that the Makhuwa case more closely approximates the Moroccan rite of return than the Ngulu or Ndembu rite of passage.

Although Makhuwa initiation rites are frequently spoken of as a maturation or growing (*wunnuwa*) and are filled with instructions that pertain to the neophytes' impending responsibilities as an adult, this scarcely diminishes the centrality of return to the home, and the embrace, of mother. On the morning following the night of "strong teachings," the initiates were joined by their mothers for a ritual known as *othanla manawo* (discover the feet). At the

paramount chief's compound, they sat covered from head to ankle in *capulana* garments. After the chief approached each novice, opening the cloths around each one's head to glimpse his face, he stepped aside and signaled for the mothers to approach. They rushed toward their sons who remained entirely under wraps except for their extended feet. The mother's task was to inspect the feet and, on that basis alone, identify her child. None had trouble doing so. Songs of rejoicing ensued, celebrating the fact that the youth were still alive and were now at the end of the initiation period. Though the initiates remained motionless under the *capulana* wrap, one could easily imagine the exhilaration they felt in the presence of their mothers after two weeks in the bush.

Turner makes note of the ritualized reunion of mother and child, which in the Ndembu case also entailed an element of disguise. For Turner, "the significance of the disguise must be mystical—for their mothers they are changed persons, they are no longer children, they have entered the adult male moral community" (Turner 1967: 254-55). This interpretation may apply as well to the Makhuwa case, with one crucial difference. While Turner acknowledges that mothers would still recognize their children despite the disguise, he leaves ambiguous whether the recognition made any difference. In the Makhuwa case, the mothers' rollicking reaction to seeing only the feet of their children left no doubt: the Makhuwa initiates may be changed persons, newly members of the adult male moral community, but they do not cease for that reason to be their mothers' precious children.

An additional rite—referred to as *wittana masima* (calling of the names)—further illustrate the importance of maternal return. Occurring two evenings before the night of "strong teachings," this ritual allows the initiate to announce to his mother the new name he has acquired in the course of the transformation. Each mother, one at a time, begins the call-and-response

sequence. One, for example, yelled: “He whom I used to call by the name Alfredo, is he alive?” Alfredo responded, “I am alive, but that name I have left behind. I am now called *nsiri*.” *Nsiri*, a type of bird, is the name Alfredo was given by his guardian early at the initiation. It is not one he will use in daily affairs following initiation. The name change is more symbolic than statutory. But the acquisition of such a name does help to mark his new status as an adult. It is of no small significance that nearly all the new names were those of birds. That they were not, for example, names of powerful land-based predators only further illustrates the historical importance, as argued in chapter one, of flight, as opposed to fight, as a response to historical pressures. Yet, as James reminds us, experience (for birds as for humans) consists of not only flights but perchings as well. Although birds’ unique capacity of ascent to transcendent heights would suggest a separation from motherhood for those taking birds as their new names, those names are consummated in a ritualized verbal exchange with the mothers themselves. As anyone brought up in this part of the world, with its diverse and omnipresent avian population, would intuitively know, one rarely leaves the nest without at some point coming back.

On the very last day of the initiation rite, following the closing Catholic mass, the newly initiated men and women returned to the natal homestead. Dancing, drinking, and feasting lasted from midday to sunrise of the following morning. That day, although a Monday, nobody went to the fields, the children remained home from school, and most market stalls stayed closed. There is much more that could be said about the celebratory homecoming, but I have already reported more than Turner bothered to. Following meticulous, highly evocative details of the transformative rites of the initiation process, Turner transitions away from them by writing, “All that remained was for the boys to go home with their guardians to their respective villages, where a further celebration awaited them” (Turner 1967: 260). For Turner, the crux of the ritual



is its transformation of boys into men. Without negating the importance of threshold and passage, I follow Crapanzano in regarding as no less essential the return of neophytes to the anxious embrace of the women who are still their mothers.

Even within the ritual itself, themes of maternity and femininity predominate. In his monograph on Makhuwa initiation rituals, Eduardo Medeiros (2007) compellingly argues that circumcision is a symbolic menstruation, a ritualized menarche performed at approximately the same age that girls undergo their physiological menarche. Because virility and fertility do not come naturally to males, boys need circumcision and medication to obtain the capacity of reproduction (*oyara*) so central to Makhuwa personhood and society. Medeiros' analysis markedly differs from the Freudian view of circumcision as castration, inflicted upon boys by adult males who consider their offspring threats. An alternate psychoanalytic theory (Bettelheim 1954) views circumcision as a consequence of "womb envy," the unconscious desire of males to identify with females and claim some of their regenerative powers, their natality. Circumcision is, on this reading, not castration but menstruation.

Cross-culturally, numerous empirical studies of initiation have made this connection (e.g., Silverman 2003, de Heusch 1985, and Meigs 1984). The dominant interpretation, however, maintains precisely the opposite. Rather than as a way of approximating to female natality, circumcision serves to negate and discard one's own feminine attributes. Beidelman, for example, notes that for the Kaguru, "the uncircumcised, moist penis makes a male unclean because this makes boys resemble women, whose moist genitals, especially during menstruation, are sources of pollution" (Beidelman 1997: 117). Circumcision thereby serves to de-feminize boys, ridding them of all the polluting elements of womanhood. Likewise, among the Ndembu, Turner reports that the prepuce is thought to be "'like the labia' of women. The boys are being

‘made pure’ by the removal of their feminine attributes—both physical and mental” (Turner 1962: 161). Such understandings justify Beidelman’s and Turner’s reliance on van Gennep’s trope of passage: from a childhood of amorphous sexuality to an adulthood that is strictly male. However, Turner at one point does acknowledge the resemblance between the color red replete in both certain liminal rituals and rituals performed for the benefit of menstruating women. In this case, Turner (1962: 151-152) notes, “The novices are implicitly treated like brides at their first menstruation.”

What Turner finds to be implicit is in fact strikingly explicit among the Makhuwa. Except where influenced by coastal Islam, Makhuwa male circumcision has not entailed and, in its revived form under Catholic church sponsorship, does not entail the removal of foreskin but rather a cut across the top of it (Medeiros 2007: 329-330). It is more an incision (*opopha*) than a circumcision (*etxantto*), the result of which is a looser foreskin that can be pulled back over the glans as opposed to an excised foreskin that leaves the glans exposed. What matters for the rite, therefore, is not the removal of any symbolic female genitalia but the significant amount of blood drawn by the cut, whatever the cut. Whether the foreskin is entirely removed or merely nicked, blood flows. Menarche is realized.

That the circumcision rite functions as a mimesis of menstruation is illustrated in numerous other ways. As noted earlier, immediately following the operation, the novices were regaled with chants of “The vagina has opened! The vagina has opened!” That this is a reference to the boys’ symbolic vagina is evident in one elder’s speech, delivered soon after the chanting ended:

We crossed from there to here, to the other river bank. There we came upon the menstruation of your mother, growing up like you are in the vagina of your mother. Everyone salivates because I said vagina. In the beginning, your mother released blood in

the vagina for you to be born. From there on the other river bank [where the operation occurred] you are imitating [*otakiha*] your mother.

The symbolic approximation of the initiates to womanhood is also exemplified in the lessons taught about taboos that attend to menstruating women: against sexual intercourse, bathing, cooking with salt or consuming salted food.<sup>4</sup> Until the initiates' wounds heal—that is to say, until the bleeding stops—both they and their mothers at home abide by the same prohibitions. That which the mother endures—not only menstruation but the accompanying taboos—must be endured by the initiates as well. When Florêncio counted eating unsalted dishes as among the challenges of his 2009 initiation, one imagines this sensitizing him somewhat to the monthly price paid by women for the cause of procreation.

Multiple stories and song-riddles recited throughout the instructional period referred, sometimes graphically, to female reproductive organs and processes. I asked one of the storytellers why this is so. He reaffirmed what I had heard in all my queries about Makhuwa values. “We speak of the vagina,” he said, “because all life comes from the vagina. For our culture, the principal point is regeneration [*oyara*]. All of us come from the vagina, so we have to respect it.” Respect for female fertility, the capacity to bring newness into the world, may be only one aspect. Vicarious experience of it seems to be another. Through symbolic menstruation, the neophyte undergoes a *turning into woman* not entirely disconnected from the *returning to the woman* (at ritual's end) who birthed him for the first time. Together the mimesis of menstruation and return to mother collapse the distinction between male and female even as the initiation rite inscribes it.<sup>5</sup> Gender boundaries are constructed and, simultaneously, traversed, much like the

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<sup>4</sup> Turner (1967:211-212) notes similar taboos for parents during Ndembu initiation rituals.

<sup>5</sup> As Eric Silverman (2003:56) writes of Jewish circumcision: “Circumcision... differentiates men *from* women by transforming men *into* women.”

spatial boundaries of the initiation grounds that likewise seem made to be crossed. What Crapanzano (1981: 129) writes of the Moroccan case—“there is no transition, only repetition and return”—aptly describe what matters in Makhuwa male initiation rites. Given the etymology of their sacred mountain—Namuli links etymologically to the verb *wula* (to menstruate), such that *nam-uli* could grammatically signify “she who menstruates”—an even better synopsis would be that most recited of proverbs: “From Namuli we come, to Namuli we return.”

### **Dispositions toward Discontinuity**

Initiation into Makhuwa adulthood is equally an instantiation of Makhuwa mobility—the sustained pattern of egress and regress explored in previous chapters. That such qualities of personhood are inscribed onto bodies partially through the initiation rite suggests that geographic migration is not merely a reaction to turbulent and unpredictable political circumstances. James Scott, despite all the commendable work he has done to highlight flight as an everyday form of resistance, at times gives the impression that peasants do little more than oppose domination through meticulously planned strategies of evasion.<sup>6</sup> Numerous critics of Scott’s earlier work have noted his inability to account for the ways in which peasants “have their *own* politics” (Ortner 1995: 177) which which need not entail “the strange process that capitalist societies call rational decision-making” (Mitchell 1990: 548).

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<sup>6</sup> For example, Scott’s emphasis on “the element of historical and strategic choice” (2009: 142) behind migration patterns leads him to make such statements as, “The key of dissimulation is the assertion ‘We are a nonstate people. We are in the hills swiddening and foraging because we have placed ourselves at a distance from the valley state’” (Scott 2009: 174). That Scott put this declaration of choice and intention in quotation marks yet without attributing it to anybody in specific underscores the problematic invocation of what Timothy Mitchell, in his critique of Scott’s earlier work, calls “the figure of the rational peasant” (Mitchell 1990: 548).

It is to Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1990) that anthropology owes the insight that dispositions often bypass consciousness, that human action traces as much from embodied thoughts and feelings as from deliberate decisions and calculated strategies. His concept of the *habitus* conveys his refusal of the Cartesian mind-body split and his sensitivity to how “objective” social conditions come to be expressed through preverbal, everyday practices. The embodiment of consciousness is commonplace among the largely non-literate Makhuwa, as it is of African societies more generally (Jackson 1989: 131). The propensity of Makhuwa peasants to flee, their proclivity for mobility, is not merely an intentional, deliberate response to external pressures. More positively and proactively, it is an internal dynamism, a proteanism<sup>7</sup> inscribed on their very bodies precisely in such rituals as those of initiation on which this chapter has focused.

This conclusion builds off of Michael Jackson’s description of Kuranko initiation rites as a site for the activation of mobile ways of being. Jackson notes the prevalence of role reversals and identity alterations among adult participants<sup>8</sup> in Kuranko female initiation: women freely parading through the village, donning the clothes and carrying the weapons of men (Jackson 1989: 129-130). The activation of such playful possibilities is in fact a reactivation. Similar to Makhuwa children who, until initiation, are considered sexually indeterminate, so too Kuranko children “enjoy a free run of house and village space, unconfined by the conventional rules that strictly separate male and female domains” (Jackson 1989: 129). The “disruption in the *habitus*”

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<sup>7</sup> I borrow this term from psychiatrist Robert Jay Lifton who argues in *The Protean Self: Human Resilience in an Age of Fragmentation* (1993) for a view of subjectivity as continually subject to reinvention. Michael Brown (1996), in his own critique of the anthropological infatuation with resistance, finds Lifton’s argument useful for noting how human actions easily interpretable as opposition to domination may be experienced by actors themselves as an expansion or transcendence of the self. I concur, though disagree with Lifton’s assumption (unchallenged by Brown) that proteanism is exceptionally characteristic of contemporary, post-modern America. Counterintuitively, and as evidence from this dissertation suggests, protean selfhood is perhaps even more readily observable in relatively non-modern African societies.

<sup>8</sup> As Jean La Fontaine (1985: 104) notes, initiation rites are as much for the already initiated as for the initiates.

that initiation rites permit among adults is the disruption of an adult *habitus* but the retrieval of an earlier one, a return to the transitory “modes of comportment and opposite sex patterns instilled in the somatic unconscious” at childhood (Jackson 1989: 129).

Role reversals and forms of identity play were frequently performed by adults at the initiation rite that I observed. As early as the first ritual meal, one especially tall, gangly man squatted down between two of the boys who were seated in a circle as the master of ceremonies went around hand-feeding each one a helping of the medication-leavened meal. When it came to be the man’s turn, he licked his lips, closed his eyes and stuck his tongue out of his wide open mouth. The master obliged and fed him a scoop, eliciting uproarious laughter and cheers from onlookers. This response is important in comparison with the fact that no one finds it particularly funny or even noteworthy when, in everyday life, children enjoy their “free run of house and village space” (Jackson 1989: 129). The humor lies in the fact that roles are defined for adults in a way they are not for children. Women are not supposed to act like men and men are not supposed to act like boys. The “free run” of adults across age and gender spectrums is ironic in a way that the “free run” of children is not.

The question then becomes: from where does this sense of defined roles and bounded domains come? In the Makhuwa context, I would argue, it is the initiation ritual itself. Although adult participants engage in role reversals and identity play, the initiates themselves are expected to remain expressionless, still, and stoic. They must not only maintain composure at their operation and other ordeals, they must also restrain their pleasure while the adults around them clown and jest. Initiates must monitor their emotions not unlike how they must monitor their movements in relation to the *ekuluwe* log: they (unlike the adults also present at the *nvera* encampment) may not cross it except at the prescribed time. Many other distinctions come into

play during the ritual process: the bush is rendered clearly distinct from the town, one encampment from another, and purity from impurity (hence the need for taboos). Likewise, after the ritual process the initiates emerge as men distinct from women, and as adults distinct from children. What Jackson (1989: 129) calls “the conventional rules that strictly separate” various domains of life for adults, though not children, are actually made conventional—consecrated or instituted as Bourdieu (1991) put it in his formulation of rites of passage as rites of institution—in the initiation rite itself. While adults engage in a disruption in the *habitus*, returning to their pre-initiation boundlessness, initiates themselves undergo a similarly significant disruption of the only *habitus* they had hitherto known. They emerge from a sense of fluidity and freedom to an awareness of propriety and boundaries.

Yet if distinctions, classifications, and boundaries are consecrated at initiation rites, they are just as importantly transgressed there. The initiates themselves perform such transgressions insofar as becoming men requires that they pass through womanhood, and becoming adults coincides with returning to mothers. But the permeability of boundaries is especially evidenced by the adult participants’ role reversals and identity plays. Their boundary transgressions serve not merely as cathartic release from adult norms; they play a pedagogical role. Although initiates must feign unawareness of the adults’ role reversals and identity plays, their dancing and bantering, no one I spoke to afterwards denied noticing any of this.<sup>9</sup> What they observed, and arguably what they learned, is that though their lives are becoming ordered, they are not becoming immobilized. Adulthood has to do with bounded domains, but no less with movement across those domains.

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<sup>9</sup> Many even told me of the pleasure “on the inside” they derived from these consoling distractions from their ordeals.

In the passage from childhood to adulthood, therefore, mobility is not so much diminished as reframed or, better put, framed for the first time. Initiation does not erase the early childhood *habitus* of mobility. It only introduces the idea of discontinuity, such that in the “passage” from childhood to adulthood, the disposition toward mobility becomes a disposition toward discontinuity. In describing dispositions this way, I do so against the conservatism in Bourdieu’s conception of *habitus*. Despite allowing for a “margin of freedom” (Bourdieu 2000: 234-237) that remains for social actors, Bourdieu comes close to asserting the determinism of structures. I concur with Michel de Certeau’s critique (see also Throop and Murphy 2002), his assessment that the dispositions (the *habitus*) described by Bourdieu:

have no movement of their own. They are the place in which structures are inscribed, the marble on which their history is engraved. Nothing happens in them that is not the result of their exteriority. As in the traditional image of primitive or peasant societies, nothing moves, there is no history other than that written on them by an alien order. (de Certeau 1984: 57)

Such assumptions about “primitive or peasant societies” appear classically in G.W.F. Hegel’s *Philosophy of History*, which described Africa as having “no movement or development to exhibit” (Hegel 1956: 99). One also sees it as recently as anthropological studies of Pentecostalism that presume radical change and discontinuity to be uniquely and exceptionally introduced by what de Certeau would call the “alien order” of Pentecostalism, never as internal to those societies on the receiving end of Pentecostal missions.

By taking seriously the idea of a disposition toward discontinuity internal to and inculcated by Makhuwa cultural frameworks, fidelity to Makhuwa tradition becomes less guarantor of stability and continuity than harbinger of potentially radical change. What Bourdieu frequently calls “durable dispositions” might just as well be called malleable dispositions or dispositions toward malleability. The enactment of these dispositions promotes not stasis and



reproduction but experimentalism and change. On this reading, preservation and innovation, structure and agency, continuity and change are bound together; moving beyond one's conditioning is, ironically, consistent with being true to it. Roberto Mangabeira Unger, in his speculative political philosophy, posits the possibility of paradigms that collapse the distinction between routine and revolution, wherein movements within paradigms are continuous with movements between them. These would be frameworks "so arranged as to facilitate and to organize their own piecemeal, experimental revision" (Unger 2007: 7), structures that render transformations banal extensions of everyday experience.

What Unger adumbrates prescriptively I have observed empirically. The Makhuwa self is a protean self, a shape-shifting self whose "essence" is mobility and mutability. Changes and movements occur endogenously, through everyday experimentalism; they do not depend on external crises or catastrophes (Unger 2007: 42). That Makhuwa society approximates this Ungerian ideal explains why it seems so easy for people like Florêncio to join Pentecostal churches, despite their demand of discontinuity. It also explains why it seems so easy to slip out of them, as Florêncio also did when he partook in the prohibited initiation rite. The barrier faced by scholars of Pentecostalism to noticing, let alone documenting, such transgressive moves is the tendency to characterize the process of conversion along the lines that van Gennep characterizes the rite of passage: singular, momentous, and once-and-for-all. It is telling that studies of initiation refer so readily to boys "converting" (Beidelman 2005: 1799) or who "are converted" (Turner 1967: 3) from partially feminized youths into purified members of an adult male moral community. There is no inherent problem with using conversion as a metaphor for initiatory transformation. The problem is that the kind of transformation Turner and Beidelman describe is the eventful kind of conversion expected by leaders of Pentecostalism and documented by

scholars of Pentecostalism, but not necessarily adhered to by ordinary followers of Pentecostalism.

The aim of this chapter has been to construct an indigenous model of religious conversion along the lines of initiatory transformation. To the point already established that conversion for the Makhuwa is a spatial affair, this chapter adds that space is not homogenous. The *habitus*-forming initiation ground is full of discontinuous, bounded domains just as the sense of self formed through initiation is full of discontinuous, bounded identities. Yet because discontinuity coexists with mobility, rupture is a regular and reversible feature of human experience. Borrowing the language with which Unger describes his program as one of “permanent revolution,” one might describe Makhuwa selfhood as a program of permanent conversion, “however, a program so conceived that the word ‘revolution’ [‘conversion’] is robbed of all romantic otherworldliness and reconciled to the everydayness of life as it is” (Unger 2007: 57).

Grasping the banality of discontinuous and bidirectional movements among Makhuwa initiates is key to understanding the banality of discontinuous and bidirectional movements among Pentecostal converts. Florêncio was so easily able to break from church teaching and undergo initiation because his initial conversion to Pentecostalism was not singular, momentous, and irreversible. His subsequent crossing from Pentecostalism back to “tradition” is best seen in the light of exactly what he experienced on the initiation grounds themselves: not just a rite of passage but a rite of passages, and not just a rite of passages but a rite of return.

## FOUR

### Engaged Pragmatism

The leaders of Florêncio's Pentecostal church may agree with my analysis that his participation in Makhuwa initiation owes to a disposition toward mobility. From their perspective, however, this disposition is less a capacity than a defect. It signals the superficiality of his conversion, the flaw of having "one foot in the church and one foot in tradition." Assumed in this complaint is an inflexible dividing line across which true converts must definitively cross. But from where did this line come? How did religion—any religion—come to be conceived as a bounded entity?

This chapter contends that the epistemology of bounded religious traditions arrived together with foreign actors, both religious and political. Yet even if that epistemology is foreign, it has been assumed and accepted by most members of the local population. The central question of this chapter, then, is not whether the category of religion is relevant in the Makhuwa context—as chapter five will show, the answer depends on whom you ask—but how those who have received it have refashioned it. Far more than a study of how a local population indigenizes the Christian religion, this chapter explores how a local population indigenizes religion itself. My argument is that the category of religion—and the assumption of "it" as a bounded entity—does very little to displace the nomadic properties of Makhuwa selfhood documented throughout this dissertation. Dividing lines introduced so as to enclose and affix people have been transformed by those very people from barriers into bridges. Of crucial importance is that crossing over and fully engaging what is on the far side has never precluded crossing back to engage, just as fully, what is near.

## Bounded Traditions

Scholars of Pentecostalism (e.g., Meyer 1999; Robbins 2003, 2007; Marshall 2009) have done a commendable job of pointing to the disjunctive dimensions of the faith, the predication of conversion-as-rupture on an opposition between Christianity and what Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu (2005: 144-147) calls “non-Christian religions.” Significantly, however, Makhuwa (like other African languages [Brenner 1989]), has no autochthonous term for “religion.” What it does have is *ettini*, a loan word from the Swahili *dini*, itself derived from the Arabic *din*. Religion, or at least the word for it, came to the Makhuwa only in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the arrival of Islam through trade networks originating in Zanzibar.

Yet the Arabic *din* has for most of its history meant something significantly different from the Latin *religio* that emerged within post-Reformation western Christianity (Smith 1963: 80-118). The main difference is that *din* was not so easily reified, systematized, and rendered in the plural.<sup>1</sup> This resistance to reification is evident in Makhuwa terms for the Islamic “religion.” These include *esilamu*, a verbal noun whose import (as in the Arabic “Islam”) is primarily in its naming an act of submission and obedience, and *emaka*, from the Arabic pronunciation of Mecca. In both cases, the religion refers less to a reified entity than to devotional acts and sacred lands. Likewise, the Makhuwa word for mosque (*ejuma*) derives from the Arabic *jumu’ah*, the Friday prayer ceremony. Here, also, the relevant point is not institutional structure or objectified entity but pious practice.

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<sup>1</sup> While Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1963: 98-102) notes that in the pre-Arabic, Persian etymology of *din* there is a plural, Carl Ernst observes that in the Qur’an at least, and therefore in the acceptance of “religion” that emerged within Islam, the word does not appear in the plural (Ernst 2003: 65).

In the mid-twentieth century, Consolata missionaries of the Roman Catholic Church, primarily from Italy, arrived in northern Mozambique and, wherever they settled, erected boundaries. These boundaries functioned, metaphorically, to separate the holy from the profane, but they took the physical form of architectural walls, walls surrounding the missions, schools, hospitals, and churches built and maintained for missionary outreach. The word *ettini* became conflated with the Christian-inspired *ekereja* (church, from the Portuguese *igreja*) and *ekapela* (chapel, from the Portuguese *capela*). This was an important shift. Now, to involve oneself with a religion meant less to submit to God, to orient oneself toward Mecca, or to perform the Friday prayers. It increasingly meant to place oneself within a bounded space, a sanctuary set apart. The term *musikitti* came to replace *ejuma* as the word for mosque.<sup>2</sup> Through this transformation from practice-based to place-based terminology emerged conditions of possibility for the spatial understanding of conversion that I have discussed as pertinent for Makhuwa conceptions of religious change. Because the space of the church was set apart from the space of the mosque, and both were set apart from ancestral ritual grounds, borders became important in a way hitherto not the case. Catholicism and Islam were now the two *ittini* (plural of *ettini*) available, non-overlapping “religions” their conceptual and spatial separation reinforced by the walls around churches and mosques, walls that serve until today as interreligious borders.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Today, *musikitti* is especially heard in villages where Catholic churches and schools have been most influential; elsewhere, *ejuma* is more commonly used. This difference may not be surprising in light of claims made by scholars (e.g., Smith 1963: 115-118; Ernst 2003: 66-68) that it is in apologetic discourses demanded by polemics with western colonialism and Christianity that Islam developed much of its systematic reification.

<sup>3</sup> As Daniel Boyarin (2004) argues, the partitioning, in late antiquity, of Christianity and Judaism into two previously undivided entities came about through the work of heresiologists who lived centuries after Jesus and Paul. These early ecclesial authorities characterized, anatomized, and sought to eradicate what they deemed to be “heresies.” Boyarin’s argument is that there was nothing natural or necessary about this distinction nor, therefore, of the borderline that allowed Christianity to emerge as an entirely new religion.

The most significant border, however, is that which divided each *ettini* from what some today call “the religion of our ancestors” (*ettini ya makholo*). This conceptual development owed primarily, once again, to Catholic missionary influences. Whereas Islam’s spread among the Makhuwa entailed “the partial Islamization of pre-Islamic religious practices” (Alpers 2000: 313), the early spread of Catholicism required that indigenous religious practices, considered demonic and defiled, be simply abandoned. Participants in such activities as divination, traditional forms of healing, and ancestor veneration would not be accepted into the Catholic communion unless they first renounced these “profane” practices. Studies from surrounding communities (e.g., Green 2003, West 2005: 109-119) confirm the commonality of attacks on what Catholic missionaries deemed incompatible with Christianity. This inflexibility threw indigenous “traditions” of various sorts into stark relief, causing them to congeal into a discrete unit entirely separate from Christianity and other “religious traditions” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 198-251).

One might assume missionaries’ insistence on the Christian/non-Christian binary would have diminished with the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). This worldwide gathering of Catholic bishops reoriented Catholic doctrine and missionary practice toward greater acceptance of and tolerance toward those things missionaries had previously labored to obliterate. A good example of this changed outlook is the evangelical and research programs of the Spanish priest Francisco Lerma Martinez, a late twentieth century and early twenty-first century Consolata missionary to the Makhuwa. In one of his many anthropological publications, he writes of his intent to “read and discover the ‘seeds of the Word’ and the signs of truth and grace present in these religions, and in the same way consider them as a true ‘preparation for the Gospel’” (Lerma Martínez 2009: 13; translation mine). Contrary to an earlier missiology that saw

Christianity as the only true religion, Lerma Martinez wrote that “one cannot talk of religion in the singular” and that, “Anthropology confirms that there is no people, however ancient, without religion” (Lerma Martínez 2009: 16-17; translation mine). Writing at a time when evolutionary models still held sway in much anthropological thinking and to an audience of missiologists who may have seen Africa as lacking anything meaningfully religious, Lerma Martinez’s claims are in fact commendably progressive. Reflecting the transformational climate of Vatican II, the particularities of what Lerma Martinez called in the subtitle of one of his books “Traditional Religions in Mozambique” demanded study and appreciation, not dismissal and denigration. However, by promoting “the genuine encounter of Christianity with the ancient African tradition” (Lerma Martínez 2009: 24; translation mine), the epistemological divide introduced by an earlier generation of theologically exclusivist missionaries remained intact. The move from a denunciatory to a dialogical model did little to diminish the sense of two “religions”: distinct, divided, and dichotomous.

Patrick Harries (2007) has shown how, in southern Mozambique, a variety of activities carried out in the early twentieth century by Swiss Romande missionaries—from classifying fauna and identifying flora to writing dictionaries and composing ethnologies—were understood to advance scientific knowledge of this African frontier. However, such knowledge, to which many Consolata missionaries in northern Mozambique also saw themselves as contributors, was less discovered than constructed, and had behind it less epistemological than existential motives: to bring some sense of order to the bewildering diversity of Africa. This process occurred throughout the continent, the classic study of the missionary invention of “tribes” and “ethnicities” being J.D.Y. Peel’s *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (2000). The erection of boundaries between ontologically distinct “religions” and “cultures” served distinctly

existential, even if (after Vatican II) decreasingly proselytizing, ends. Sorting hitherto fluid and polymorphous humans into separate groupings aided the process of understanding, managing, and bringing some rational order to one's engagements with them.

More perniciously, the process of classifying populations also facilitated colonizers' administrative ambitions. Conceptual containment advanced the goal of political containment. Thus, "the discovery of an indigenous religious system on southern African frontiers depended upon colonial conquest and domination. Once contained under colonial control, an indigenous population was found to have its own religious system" (Chidester 1996: 19; see also Ranger 1993). It is for this reason that not only colonial but postcolonial governors found it expedient to organize fluid and open multicultural environments into hermetically sealed abstractions. Following independence in 1975, in its adoption of strategies for socialist modernization, FRELIMO engaged in similar reductionisms. It constructed an opposition between "science" and "obscurantism," both understood to be internally coherent, bounded "traditions," the former to be promoted and the latter eradicated. By grouping a complex of activities—activities as varied as initiation, healing, divination, funerary rites, and ancestral offerings—as "obscurantism," FRELIMO came closer to its goal of managing the population and seeing it advance.<sup>4</sup> This push toward systematizing, classifying, and reifying "traditions" can be traced back to the influence of the European modernist imaginary on the various historical actors—Catholic missionaries, Portuguese colonialists, post-independence socialists—that have descended on the people who today self-identify (precisely because of those actors) as Makhuwa.

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<sup>4</sup> According to James Scott (1998), the projection of state power always entailed such simplifications, the transformation of wild terrain into legible and comprehensible units.



It is important to note the foreignness to the Makhuwa context of most epistemological divisions. However, this should not dissuade us from attending to their contemporary salience. While Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1963) and, following him, Talal Asad (1993) are correct that “religion” in the sense of a coherent, integrated, and bounded “belief system” is peculiarly and parochially a product of European intellectual history, nevertheless it and similar conceptual categories “have been let out of the bag, and we are hardly in a position to scoop them back up again” (Keane 2007: 86).<sup>5</sup> If second-order abstractions did not always organize people’s perception of the world around them, for many in postcolonial societies, today they do. Even if able to resist “conversion” to Christianity and assimilation to European ways, those on the receiving end of evangelistic efforts still found themselves drawn into Eurocentric discursive frames. If we take seriously this “colonization of consciousness” (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991), then the postcolonial celebration of hybridity, like the postmodern championing of flux, must be seen as going too far. Hermetically sealed groupings and well-defined borders may be fabrications, but fabrications are nevertheless facts—social facts—as much for the colonized as the colonizer, for the evangelized as the evangelizer.

### **Polyontological Mobility**

Easily the commonest complaint I heard from Pentecostal leaders was against the incomplete evangelization carried out by the local Catholic church. Especially problematic was its tolerance of “Makhuwa tradition.” People are not easy to evangelize, Pentecostal pastors said, because

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<sup>5</sup> Smith therefore takes his perspicacious genealogy of religion a step too far by advocating that the word religion be dropped (Smith 1963: 50). Missing from his analysis is an account of how phenomenologically salient the category has become for even many people previously without it.

they have been misled by the Italian-born Father Giuseppe Frizzi, Maúa district's longtime Catholic leader, into thinking Jesus Christ and ancestral spirits could be simultaneously followed. The concern expressed is one of illegitimate mixing, of syncretizing Christianity and paganism, thereby diluting the sanctity of the former with the profanity of the latter.

Whether or not the critique is justified, the characterization of the “problem” itself is not quite accurate. In broad strokes, one might see the fact of baptized Catholics consulting with diviners, imbibing traditional medicines, and offering *makeya* as evidence for the fusion of multiple religious worlds. But the broad strokes miss what is evident up close: that ancestors are rarely brought into the church's daily masses and that Catholic saints never appear at home shrines for the ancestors. The popular Catholicism of Maúa district, it turns out, is not like that of other parts of the world with highly developed extra-ecclesial devotional cultures (e.g., Orsi 1985, Taylor 1996, Tweed 1997). In such places, distinctions between the “popular” and the “official” go unheeded by ordinary practitioners and hybridized rituals are performed “as if [they] were unitary—fully Christian and fully indigenous” (McGuire 2008: 197). In Maúa, rather than fusion or syncretism, bricolage or *mestizaje*, one sees an acceptance of and investment in disparate zones, however not without a willingness to tack back and forth between them.

The best example of this oscillating style of engagement returns us to the initiation ceremony I observed in 2012. Father Frizzi has organized the ceremony in the district capital every year since 1989, when the civil war was winding down and when FRELIMO removed its ban on “obscurantist” practices such as rituals of initiation. Catholic sponsorship of the ritual is not uncommon in the region (see Rasing 1995, West 2005: 115-16). In Maúa district, in fact, it is only under Catholic sponsorship that the ritual takes place with anything like the regularity and

scale of times past.<sup>6</sup> Yet while Father Frizzi talks about this as the “Christianizing” of the ritual, a “resurrection” of it “with the stamp of the church,” close observation, again, suggests something far more subtle. Father Frizzi invites Makhuwa ritual specialists to participate in both the male and female initiation ceremonies, but to do so not *for* the Catholic Church but, rather, alongside it. The nature of this cooperation was evident in the schedule of activities in the ceremony I attended. At the *nvera* site, following the healing of the incision, church catechists and Makhuwa elders alternated in their imparting of wisdom to the neophytes. In the mornings, the initiates heard Biblical narratives, partook in a midweek mass, and made confessions to Father Frizzi when he visited the *nvera* grounds late in the week. Morning instructions also came from government ministries—of education and of health, in particular—whom Father Frizzi invited to instruct on matters of schooling, disease prevention, and civic participation. The nights, on the other hand, belonged to Makhuwa elders and wisdom teachers (*anamiruku*). Initiates sat around a fire pit while instructors danced and sang close to the flame. Call-and-response song-riddles, to the steady beat of drums, allowed initiates to learn through the performance of verse more than through the memorization of propositions, ingraining in their bodies lessons on how to bury the dead, relate to ancestors, show respect for elders, and bring forth new life (teachings about sexuality were especially extensive and detailed). Of greatest significance is that, even though Makhuwa catechists were present and participatory at night and Makhuwa elders and wise men involved during the day, a strict dichotomy was observed: I heard no reference to ancestors or ancestral traditions during the day and no reference to Jesus, the

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<sup>6</sup> In Kaveya village, for example, no ritual has been organized since the one attended by Florêncio and described in the previous chapter. That was in 2009. Besides the challenge of reviving the ritual after decades of government prohibition, other reasons given to me by village chiefs as to why initiation ceremonies are so uncommon today include the increasing costs of doing so (or, more basically, the increasing monetization of goods and services among people who may go their whole lives without seeing Mozambican currency) and the concern that spending weeks in the bush leaves not only ritual participants but family members, homesteads, and farms vulnerable to elephant invasions. For the elevated nature of this concern in recent years, see chapter two of this dissertation.

saints, or Catholic traditions during the night. Distinct yet complementary—like day and night, man and woman, town and bush, mortar and pestle—the two traditions or, as post-Vatican II missionary priests have it, the two “religions” coexist without one subsuming the other. Father Frizzi, despite speaking of the church’s sponsorship as a “Christianizing” of the ritual, insisted that it be programmed this way, in accord with what he correctly took to be a basic Makhuwa principle of separation without isolation or, in Frizzi’s own formulation, “duality without dualism.”

This is not to say Frizzi at all times resists greater integration. A few years before I carried out fieldwork, he brought to his catechists the idea of creating within the church a commission of traditional healers (*anamuku*). A diligent and sensitive ethnographer of Makhuwa healing traditions (see Frizzi 2008), Frizzi saw no reason to maintain a separation between the spiritual salvation offered by Catholicism and the bodily healing offered by indigenous traditions. One can readily appreciate how distant this policy was from that of Frizzi’s far less tolerant predecessors. Early Catholic missionaries (like contemporary Pentecostal ones) deemed such practices demonic and saw no place for them even alongside the church, let alone inside it. This form of “inculturation” (Schreiter 1985), however, was flatly rejected by Frizzi’s Makhuwa catechists. One of them told me they could not accept Frizzi’s proposal to mix traditional healing and the church because Frizzi’s own predecessors convinced them the two simply do not mix. Evident in this reaction are the two crucial points of this chapter: first, the internalization of epistemological divides introduced by early missionaries (among others) and sustained by the anthropological assumptions of contemporary missionaries; second, a comfort with pluralism left as pluralism, a willingness to let disparate traditions remain disparate, without forcing conciliation.

Extraordinarily attuned though Frizzi is to the particularities of Makhuwa language and culture, his search for singularity and wholeness in his proposal for “Catholic *anamuku*” may be an example of his European heritage coming through. Western scholars, not least anthropologists, have long viewed religions as systems of belief: ordered, coherent, and logically consistent. Both the Catholic concept of inculturation and the anthropological notion of syncretism uphold this bias toward wholeness no less than does the thoroughly discredited quest for purity. In her study of Islam among the Giriama of Kenya, Janet McIntosh (2009) saw a model of multiplicity captured less by “syncretism” than by “polyontology” (her coinage). Eschewing any search for an overarching coherence, polyontology holds open pluralism and fluidity without discarding the sense of distinct, compartmentalized essences. “Religious plurality,” McIntosh writes, “is not about reconciling Islam and Giriama Traditionalism into a new, systemic whole, but about drawing on both religions while continuing to mark them as distinct. More than one religion may be used, but they are juxtaposed rather than blended” (McIntosh 2009: 188). The multiplicity of states, identities, or positionalities one might assume in this model is not a simultaneous multiplicity but a serial one, akin to what computer scientists call toggling or multitasking, what linguists call code switching, and what psychologists call cognitive shifts.

Combining the modernist (but also now Makhuwa) epistemology of distinct “traditions” with the longstanding Makhuwa disposition toward mobility brings us to what I would call, building off of McIntosh, *polyontological mobility*. People have by and large accepted the epistemology of separate “religions”, but not its implications for religious identity. The borders between religions are real—they have become social facts—but what a mobile people such as the Makhuwa bring to borders is neither an acceptance of confinement nor a refusal of

acknowledgement but, rather, a facility of transgression.<sup>7</sup> Offering praise to Jesus and offering *makeya* to ancestors are neither mutually incompatible nor simultaneously compatible. They are *serially* compatible. Writing about the presumed antagonism of religion and science in western societies, William James (1985: 122-23) asks:

why, after all, may not the world be so complex as to consist of many interpenetrating spheres of reality, which we can thus approach in alternation by using different conceptions and assuming different attitudes?... On this view religion and science, each verified in its own way from hour to hour and from life to life, would be co-eternal.

For the Makhuwa, the co-eternality of religious alternatives means that commitment to the Catholic religion at one time and in one place need not preclude commitment to ancestral religion in another time and another place.<sup>8</sup> Sincere devotion need not require singular devotion. Fidelity is not isomorphic with exclusivity. Fausto, one of my research partners, illustrated the point well: “it is not that we have one foot in the church and one foot in tradition, but both feet in the church *when we are there*, and both feet on the ancestral grounds *when we are there*.”

Religious conversion as a form of polyontological mobility affirms Joel Robbins’ theorization of Pentecostal conversion: his insistence on rupture, discontinuity, and the kind of “radical change” required by the act of border crossing (Robbins 2007). However, the demand

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<sup>7</sup> A parallel to such conversion patterns may be found in migration trends following the European invention and imposition of national borders upon the continent at the 1884-85 Berlin Conference. These borders are constructed, yet real; and they are real, but not impenetrable. They may be traversed, and they may be re-traversed. Indeed, as numerous studies from the region show (e.g., Englund 2002a) they regularly are.

<sup>8</sup> Numerous parallel concepts exist in scholarship on the history of religions. In the Latin American context, David Carrasco coined the term “asymmetrical hybridity” to describe religious practitioners who “seek access to the spiritual power of Spanish invaders while *also* reviving access to indigenous traditions,” “creating new forms of religiosity” as a result (Carrasco 2007: 69). Another parallel may be found in the concept of *kathenotheism* that Max Müller coined to describe the manner of relating to the multiplicity of deities in Vedic traditions. *Kathenotheism* entails the worship of multiple gods and goddesses in a specific manner: one at a time. Each is exalted to the exclusion of others *when being addressed*, each complete in its proper time and place. Each is supreme, but each in turn (see Eck 1998: 26; Doniger 2014: 10-12).

for rupture in my concept of polyontological mobility is not, as it is for Robbins, a demand for definitiveness. Discontinuity is a continuous affair, a series of oscillations and alternations, a bidirectional process rather than a once-and-for-all event. The problem with Robbins' formulation is his acceptance of official Pentecostal views that there is something incomplete about conversions made for pragmatic reasons. Such conversions have only reached the first stage of what Robbins delineates as a two-stage process, the first entailing utilitarian poaching and the second entailing intellectual assent (Robbins 2004: 84-88). Elsewhere, Robbins accuses anthropologists of operating with an implicit model of "crypto-religion" in their tendency to discredit claims of people to have disconnected from traditional religion in their conversions to Christianity. In typical anthropological accounts of religious change, such people "have managed to preserve their religious consciousness largely intact and thus should not be counted as Christians" (Robbins 2011: 412). The task Robbins sets for himself is to understand why, in some cases (usually ignored by anthropologists), "people stay with the new religion and come to engage it deeply" (Robbins 2004: 87). This requires positing a second stage—the intellectualist stage—of conversion, that which moves converts beyond crypto-religious utilitarianism to full-fledged Christianity. But what is implied by pairing the idea of *staying with* a new religion with that of *engaging* it deeply? Is duration necessary for depth? Is temporariness necessarily superficial?

Robbins justifies his theory of Pentecostal conversion on the grounds that it takes native exegesis into account; indeed, for doing so it deserves great credit (see Chua 2012: 16-18). But which natives are granted exegetical privilege? Unsurprisingly, it is those whom anthropologists of Christianity are most prone to hearing: converts offering their testimonies in church and clerical elites instructing on authentic conversion. In making these the Christians most worth

listening to, Robbins ends up assuming his conclusion. He grants the power to define conversion as intellectualism (rather than *mere* utilitarianism) to those who have already arrived at Robbins' second, intellectualist, stage.<sup>9</sup> But what of the perspective of ordinary practitioners, those whose oscillations between religions are likely to be as unproblematic as their oscillations between the tidy stages of explanatory models? Such people are easily missed or dismissed, guided as they are by something other than intellectuals' predilection for "intellectualism" (Bourdieu 2000). Thus, when Robbins writes that one advantage of his two-stage theory is that "it hypothesizes that what can look like chaotic processes of change actually have a structure" (Robbins 2004: 87), the question arises: but who really needs this structure? Is it the "convert" or the anthropologist, the practitioner or the theorist? As James Scott writes about the nomadic hill peoples of southeast Asia, what strikes observers as "a series of abrupt, wrenching changes" in their ethnic self-identification may be experienced by those accustomed to mobility and multiplicity as "a gradual and imperceptible process" (Scott 2009: 273). In other words, shifts in ethnicity, location, or religion may be discontinuous, but discontinuity may be a way of life, as banal as fixity and continuity. Scott adds, "If we can imagine this ethnic succession as a relatively seamless affair, then it follows that it could be just as seamless when the direction is reversed... The way to the valley state was a two-way street and leaving need be no more jarring or traumatic than entering" (Scott 2009: 273). For the Makhuwa, the ease of "leaving and entering" (*ohiya ni ovolowa*) discrete traditions—like their ease of circulating between village and bush, countryside and city, tradition and modernity—is similarly neither jarring nor traumatic. Nor is it irreversible.

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<sup>9</sup> This is a common bias in scholarly treatments of "world Christianity," one for which I have elsewhere criticized field-defining scholar Lamin Sanneh's focus (in, e.g., Sanneh 1989) on indigenizing missionaries nearly to the exclusion of indigenous converts (Premawardhana 2011: 33-34).



## The Search for Life

Of the two Pentecostal churches located in Maúa's district capital, the Evangelical Assembly of God (*Evangélica Assembléia de Deus*, hereafter EAD) was composed primarily of *vientes* (newcomers), relatively well-off and formally educated individuals who came from elsewhere to take up one of the district's very few salaried jobs. Unlike at the Assembly of God African (*Assembléia de Deus Africana*, hereafter ADA), dress at the EAD was formal—the fact that worshippers wore shoes was alone enough to deter many locals—and the language of worship was Portuguese with no translation to Makhuwa. Only two people born and raised in the district regularly attended EAD services in the year of my fieldwork.

One of them, Raimundo, drew my attention because his uncle—in whose home Raimundo was raised—held a prominent leadership position in the district's Catholic Church. As the lead catechist and chief aide to Father Frizzi, Raimundo's uncle was well known and well respected. He not only officiated at many of the Catholic parish masses, he was also the man called by government officials to conduct the Christian invocation (while the local sheikh conducted the Islamic one) at public assemblies. That Raimundo broke from the Catholicism of so prominent a family seemed to exemplify the narratives on which much scholarly attention has focused, narratives of defection not only from kin networks to church networks but from Catholicism to Pentecostalism.<sup>10</sup>

I asked Raimundo how he came to participate in the Pentecostal church. He was following a friend, he said. When I asked him who the friend was, his reluctance to name him suggested to me that there was more than friendship involved. Raimundo admitted that, in fact,

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<sup>10</sup> See the discussion of what I call “the Pentecostalization thesis” in the introduction to this dissertation.

the person he followed into the EAD was more like a benefactor, a man for whom he had initially performed menial services—going to the market for him, repairing his motorcycle—but later was able to count on for financial gifts. Raimundo did not speak of it as a relationship of employment, but it certainly was one of dependence. In return for this support, Raimundo did his best to reciprocate with what little he had. He accepted the man’s invitation to visit his church. After attending once, Raimundo found it hard to stop. He knew that his patron received accolades from Pastor Manuel for bringing in a new member, particularly one from the local population. Raimundo liked that he could repay the financial sponsorship of his “friend” by granting him, through steadfast presence at the church, the reward of spiritual blessings. Thus he remained in good standing with the church so as to remain in good standing with the man.

Enmeshment in relations of dependency was not unusual for Raimundo. As a child, when his mother was flown to Cuamba because of a severe illness, Raimundo found a way to follow her, taking advantage of his youth to hitch a ride on a Red Cross plane (during the civil war, this was the only viable means of long-distance travel). After his mother recovered, Raimundo set off once again, following a friend to Mandimba where he put himself at the service of various benefactors, washing plates and cleaning patios, only to find himself in one abusive situation after another: beaten, accused of stealing, irregularly compensated. One year later he decamped again, for the provincial capital of Lichinga, where a restaurant owner took him in. He spent his mornings hauling crates of beer and soda to the restaurant atop his head; the rest of the day, until closing, he served in the kitchen. His compensation was food and a bed.

The subordinations to which Raimundo submitted himself throughout this time seemed to me deplorable. They are the kinds of hierarchical arrangements that unsettle those of us brought up with what James Ferguson (2013: 224) calls the “emancipatory liberal mind.” But, as

Ferguson argues, relations of obligation have long been part of what it means to be a person in southern Africa. Rather than to autonomy—a western ideal—aspirations are to “a plurality of opportunities for dependence” (Ferguson 2013: 226). That very plurality serves as a check against abusive power, since exit is always an option. This, it turns out, has long been Raimundo’s *modus vivendi*: escape in times of hardship, even if only into yet another relation of subordination.

Raimundo returned to his natal district when he could no longer bear his situation in Lichinga. This is where he met the benefactor who invited (or coaxed) him to join his Pentecostal church.<sup>11</sup> That Raimundo entered the church in search of patronage may be seen as insincere or inauthentic, as crassly utilitarian or opportunistic. Yet it should be noted that within weeks of entering the EAD, Raimundo saw himself deriving satisfaction from factors internal to church life itself. He appreciated the level of camaraderie, support, and mutual respect within this community. He also felt the connection to God to be more intense, intimate, and immediate than he had experienced in other traditions.<sup>12</sup> By the time I met Raimundo, on my first visit to the EAD church, he was a fervent worshipper, articulate when called on to pray and boisterous in call-and-response sequences. Not unlike everyone else I observed in both the EAD and ADA—even those I knew to continue engaging with ancestral traditions outside—Raimundo related to Pentecostalism with passion and vigor.

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<sup>11</sup> This suggests a unique twist on the standard narrative in much scholarship: of Pentecostal conversion following migration *to* Africa’s emerging cities, not (as in Raimundo’s case) *from* them.

<sup>12</sup> This supports Ferguson’s own speculation that the necessity of “relations of dependence” can help make sense of the continent-wide rise of evangelical Christianity, wherein submission to God offers one a sense of place and personhood in a context where opportunities for social relations are rapidly diminishing (Ferguson 2013: 240). On both the social and theological planes, Raimundo’s conversion established bonds of belonging.

Yet Raimundo's faith encompassed far more than what the church could contain. This became clear to me when he contracted an illness, a painful and disfiguring skin infection known locally as *munapheyo*. I received the news during a Sunday worship service at the EAD church, shortly after I returned to town from a week in Kaveya village. Following the service, I eagerly accompanied the congregants across town to the district hospital, concerned just as all of them were about the condition of our friend. It was not good. We found him under the care of his aunt, wife, and mother (who had come in from Cuamba) inside one of the dank hospital rooms. It was a sparse room, with nothing to suggest it was a place of healing other than a warning sign tacked to the wall: "beds are for patients, not for visitors." Raimundo was on one of those beds, propped up on one side, head resting on rolled-up sheets. The exposed half of his face was discolored and disfigured, covered with lesions and boils from the side of his mouth up to his forehead. That eye was completely shut, his skin puffy and red around it. Two flies swarmed around his open sores. What little energy Raimundo seemed to have he expended swatting the flies away, taking care to swipe away from his face to avoid striking or grazing his wounds.

As the ten of us from the church entered the room and greeted Raimundo he did his best to open his mouth and reciprocate, but nothing came out. We took turns approaching him, holding his hand, expressing words of encouragement and solidarity. Most of the hour, though, we spent in silence, except of course when we prayed, which we repeatedly did. Prayer was the main reason Pastor Manuel led us directly from the church to the hospital. These were not the same demon-exorcizing prayers with which Pentecostal worship services are replete—the clapping, stomping, and screaming kind that were, anyway, more characteristic of the ADA than the relatively more staid EAD. They were, however, prayers that petitioned for and anticipated the miracle of healing:

We give you thanks, all powerful Father Lord. Thank you God. This afternoon, Holy Father, we come here before you. Our brother is suffering, our God. We ask, Father, for the Holy Spirit, King of Glory. We ask, Father, that you come to end this infirmity, our God. Because, Father, we place all our faith in you, Holy Father, dear Father. Pour out your holy spirit, King of Glory. Pour out your holy spirit, Father. Operate a miracle in this brother here, Raimundo, who is suffering. In the name of the Lord Jesus, we ask you and thank you this afternoon in the name of Jesus. Amen.

Leaving the hospital, the man who offered this prayer—a school teacher from the largest and most economically developed northern city of Nampula—told me it is prayers alone (*orações só*) that will heal Raimundo. The emphasis on “prayers *alone*” did not indicate opposition to hospital treatment. It was specifically a rebuke of “traditional” solutions: roots, herbs, ancestral offerings. “We place *all* our faith in you, Holy Father,” went the prayer, for which Raimundo afterwards exerted himself to thank us. He seemed also willing to put *all* his faith in God, in the healing techniques of the Pentecostal church.

But for Raimundo, it turned out, putting *all* his faith in the Pentecostal God was not inconsistent with pursuing other avenues of healing, also with *all* his faith. He could commit wholeheartedly to prayers without committing wholeheartedly to prayers *alone*. Praying alone, he told me after his discharge from the hospital, would leave him feeling helpless, inactive, unfulfilled:

Let’s suppose you are hungry. The church prays for you, for you to be filled, but doesn’t give you anything to eat. But God said that you have to eat something, anything. You don’t eat, but someone prays for you. You won’t be filled that way. You can die of hunger!

The value of prayer is in its inducement of, not substitution for, further action. Godfrey Lienhardt observed something similar in Dinka ritual action which, he writes, “is not a substitute for practical or technical action, but a complement to it and preparation for it.” It is “a model of... desires and hopes, upon which to base renewed practical endeavour” (Lienhardt 1961: 283). The consequent movement from passivity to action is “the conversion of a situation of death into a

situation of life” (Lienhardt 1961: 296). This death-to-life “conversion” is spoken of, among the Makhuwa, as *wasasa ekumi*, literally “the search for life.” In that search, Raimundo never contented himself with deploying any one tactic, with taking any one route.

It should come as no surprise, then, that Raimundo had no trouble resuming residence in the compound of his uncle and aunt despite church members urging him not to. They saw the home of his “pagan” relatives as “a house of lies.” Raimundo, however, feared for his safety at his own home. If this had been a normal illness—an “illness from God” (*eretta ya Muluku*)—the hospital would have taken care of it. It was not. He knew this not only because little healing came from the hospital but because, immediately after leaving it, he consulted with two different diviners to ascertain the true cause of the illness.<sup>13</sup> It was an occult attack by envious neighbors—envious, Raimundo speculated, of his having an influential uncle and a rich benefactor. So identifying the cause of the problem opened the path toward a concrete solution, the consumption of traditional medicines. “Yes, I had to take the [traditional] medicines after praying,” he said. “A person has to do something, has to ask God for something to do, anything.” He spent the rest of his convalescence on the compound of his aunt and uncle where he continued to receive prayerful visits from EAD congregants during the day, and where he continued to consume traditional medicines prepared by his aunt—herself a healer (*namuku*)—at night.

The final time I saw Raimundo during my fieldwork year was at that compound. He was preparing to travel back to Cuamba, to return with his mother to her home for further recovery. He would be able to receive more extensive hospital treatment at the superior medical facility

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<sup>13</sup> A single consultation, he said, was not enough because it needed verification. One could not trust, or have faith (*ororomela*) in a single diviner. What happens if the second diviner contradicts the first? I asked. Go to a third, he said.

there; it was also where one of the diviners he consulted resided. He was not going to close off any options: wherever the destination, whoever the benefactor, whatever the tradition, whoever the healer. A few days before his departure, he walked to the EAD church. In Pastor Manuel's account:

He said to me, "Well, I won't try to hide that I tried everything: the way of traditional medicine, the way of the hospital. But I am not finding a solution. I see now that the solution is with God alone." I said to him, "This is all that has been lacking. If you had decided this awhile back, you would already be well. God is not a person who promises and does nothing. He is the master."

Raimundo requested forgiveness and prayers, and followed up those requests with one for a stamped transfer letter that would grant him welcome at the Cuamba congregation of the EAD. Pastor Manuel was happy to oblige and, at the following Sunday service, triumphantly announced to his cheering congregants: "he has returned!" But in fact, Raimundo was already back on the move—regionally and, I suspect, religiously as well. Not unlike in his adolescence, he was on the road again, willing to pursue whichever paths enhanced his share of health, wealth, and well-being. He was back, once again, on the search for life.

### **Side-Stepping**

This chapter began by recognizing the reality of "religions" and "religious borders" in the Makhuwa context. However, what is notable about the relation of people like Raimundo to Pentecostalism is not so much the epistemological divide between Pentecostalism on the one hand and indigenous practices and beliefs on the other. What matters is that, despite the distinct domains, so many move bi-directionally between them with nimbleness and ease.

The everyday experience of the Makhuwa is replete with such eclectic and opportunistic oscillations, with what John Dewey (1929) referred to as an experimental habit of mind in

contrast with a dogmatic one. The pragmatic attitude toward life evident in the way people like Raimundo relate to such novelties as Pentecostalism is not unique to engagements with Pentecostalism. Throughout the African continent (see Jackson 1989, Whyte 1997), pragmatism characterizes people's pursuits of personal and communal health, security, and prosperity. In situations of scarcity and adversity that have always marked life in Africa (as they have human life everywhere), no single approach is granted the status of finality or singularity. If one measure of rationality is ideological consistency and logical coherence, it has almost always been reasonable for the Makhuwa to be "irrational." In this regard, the kind of passing and partial participation of people like Raimundo in newly arrived Pentecostal churches is a contemporary variation on a perennial theme. In becoming Pentecostal, they may (temporarily) abandon Makhuwa traditions like healing traditions and initiation rituals, but they do not abandon the experimentalism and pragmatism of the Makhuwa way of being. Conversion out of "traditional religion" is an extension of the ordinary conversions within it. In this case of "permanent conversion" extraordinary movements out of a framework are extensions of ordinary movements within them, and regress is just as likely as egress.

Such words as pragmatism, eclecticism, and opportunism may worry those who, for good reason, wish not to see Africans portrayed as they long have been: as irrational primitives incapable of engaging such markers of "civilization"—monotheistic world religions, centralized state centers, fixed residential structures—other than superficially. However, when those among whom I lived do such things as polycrop and shift from one field to another, or consult with multiple diviners or healers before laying out a further course of action, they do so far from superficially. They do so as if their lives depend on it. Quite often, they do.



Raimundo always struck me as exceedingly engaged in his Pentecostal devotion: passionate in his prayers, enthusiastic in his bodily gestures, full-throated in his singing. Yet the plenitude of his religious practice in the Pentecostal church did not interfere with the plenitude of his religious practice outside of it. This manner of polyontological mobility—described above as engagement with multiple traditions in a serial and juxtaposed, rather than simultaneous and blended, manner—is perhaps captured less by the term pragmatism than by that of “engaged pragmatism.” This type of pragmatism is entirely consistent with what is often called a “deep” relationship with each of the various traditions engaged. That in his search for health, wealth, and wellbeing Raimundo entered (*ovolowa*), left (*ohiya*), and then entered (*ovolowa*) again the Pentecostal church may make his participation temporary but not, for that reason, superficial.

Regarding religious conversion, James wrote: “that it should for even a short time show a human being what the high-water mark of his spiritual capacity is, this is what constitutes its importance,—an importance which backsliding cannot diminish” (James 1985: 257). I share James’ view that quality matters at least as much as duration, though this vital point may be better made without the disparaging concept of “backsliding.” The term is problematic for multiple reasons. Suggested by the term “back” is a retrogression from some temporally advanced state; and conveyed in the term “sliding” is both a continuum rather than a division between traditions and a passive rather than agentic relation to them. The better alternative to “backsliding,” if one were needed, would be “side-stepping.” This is not to be confused with “sidestepping,” an evasive move, for the polyontological mobility of those I came to know is precisely not an evasion of their dire circumstances. It is a confrontation of them through all avenues available. It is not an empty pragmatism, but a highly engaged one.

**PART III**

***OKHALA-NO—TO BE WITH***

## FIVE

### ‘Makhuwa Women Have no Religion’

Previous chapters have described transient border-crossing as a *modus vivendi* for the Makhuwa, a way of being that informs their relationship with the newly arrived Pentecostal churches. It would be wrong, however, to consider mobility an end in itself. The argument of this and the following chapter is that mobility, of the religious kind in particular, is a means of making connections, of reciprocally coexisting with significant others—people, spirits, or deities. Modernist trends toward possessive individualism have, in the realm of religion, taken the form of having or possessing a singular religious identity. Key for the argument of this chapter is the foreignness to the Makhuwa context of having or possessing anything at all. “To have,” in the Makhuwa conception, is literally “to be with” (*okhala-no*). Owing largely to their exclusion from processes of modernization—including from those things deemed “religions”—women, more than men, exhibit this traditionally Makhuwa ethic of commensality over acquisition. By analyzing changing gender relations in northern Mozambique, this chapter discloses how religion and religious identities are less objects for acquisition than avenues for “being-with” (*okhala-no*), less about possession than about participation.

#### Neuza

Not long into my fieldwork year it began to worry me that I was failing to get female perspectives on my research questions. This had to do with the tight control men exerted over women’s lives, and the difficulty of gaining the trust of most men to talk directly with the women they saw themselves as responsible for if not dominant over. At the same time, women

frequently came up in my inquiries into why and when people change religions. It is really only women who do so, I was told, because “Makhuwa women have no religion.” Meant by this was that women do not determine their own religious affiliations or practices. Girls follow the religion of their maternal uncles; wives follow the religion of their husbands. Religious conversion most often occurs when a woman marries, leaves a marriage (through divorce or widowhood), or remarries. Not surprisingly, it was men who most often told me this.

Yet as unpleasant as it was to hear this from men, even more so was hearing it from women, which I also frequently did. Should I enlighten the women I came to know by sharing how differently we do things in my culture, indeed in my marriage? I tried this once, telling a young woman—whose schooling in Lichinga led me to believe she would take a more feminist stand—that my wife and I are happily married though not of the same religion. “Then that is not marriage!” came her unrestrained reply.

It would not be wrong to attribute the proverb “Makhuwa women have no religion” to male chauvinism, to the same forces of patriarchy that made it so rare for me to hear directly from women, to learn in any depth the circumstances of religious change in their lives. Yet when an opportunity to do so finally did arise, it forced me to reconsider the remark, to explore whether something other than internalized patriarchy may be at play in women’s willing endorsement of it.

Neuza, a young, unmarried woman, was introduced to me by my research assistant, Paulino, as a former participant of Kaveya village’s Assembly of God African (*Assembléia de Deus Africana*, hereafter ADA) congregation. Intrigued to know she belonged to the Pentecostal church for two years before returning to the Catholic faith in which she was brought up, I jumped at the prospect of talking with her. Paulino and I located her one morning tending crops in her

family's field. She agreed to talk with us but only in the presence of her elders. Gathering her hoe and seed bag, she led us on a footpath back toward the compound on which she lived. Seated on reed mats in the shade of the *alpendre* were two women, both of them introduced as Neuza's aunts, and one man, Neuza's mother's brother (her mother had passed away). I bent low and greeted each elder in turn, touching my hands to theirs and then to my head and heart. There was no need for long introductions since they knew me from my occasional visits to the Catholic church to which they belonged.

I turned my attention to Neuza, a list of questions piled high in my head. What drew her to the ADA? What difference did Pentecostalism make in her life? What led her eventually to leave? She began telling her story, but in short order was interrupted. It was all one big deception, said her uncle. I looked to Neuza for an explanation and she revealed that she had been participating in the church for nearly two years until a time came when she fell ill. ADA leaders came to the compound to pray for her and noticed traditional medicines laid out on the floor.

"People in the *Assembléia* speak badly of traditional medicine," the uncle said.

"It was me who was using it," intervened one of the older women. "I was also ill at the time."

The uncle began berating the Pentecostals for condemning Neuza over the traditional medicines. Neuza kept quiet as the man who assumed the role of her spokesperson carried on with his attacks, and did so with increasing volume and vigor.

I quickly saw that this interview would not yield what I had hoped. Paulino, sensing my disappointment, told our hosts that we would understand Neuza's story better if we could speak

with her in private. It was a request I would not have felt comfortable making, but I was grateful to Paulino for doing so, for trading in the social capital he enjoyed as a former catechist of Kaveya's Catholic community. One of the older women supported Paulino's proposal, voicing aloud what I was thinking: "Neuza is not speaking what she wants to." She suggested we move the conversation to the Catholic compound, just down the path. To my relief, Neuza's uncle, as well as Neuza herself, consented.

Paulino and I took to tracing Neuza's steps again, this time the short way to the village's Catholic chapel. We sat down on the benches along the circumference of the open-air *alpendre* and resumed our conversation, Neuza still speaking softly but visibly more at ease. She related how her brother (now living in the district capital) introduced her to the ADA and she glowed over how much she gained from the prayers there. These prayers helped her deal not only with her personal ailments but also with those of her kin, on whose behalf she never hesitated to petition the Holy Spirit. She said that she was not exactly expelled from the ADA, but placed under reprehension. Her uncle responded by issuing his own punishment, prohibiting Neuza once and for all from again attending the Pentecostal church.

Though her return to Catholicism was not of her will, Neuza shared that she had no misgivings, neither about returning to the Catholic church nor about returning to the consumption of traditional medicines that the Catholic church tolerates.

"It's good for the body, even though my heart is still with the *Assembléia*," she said.

"So when you are sick now, what do you do?" I asked.

"I take medicine, I do *makeya*," she said. "But I also do prayers."

"In the Catholic church?" I asked.

At this moment she glanced behind her, toward the compound we had just left behind, then leaned in closer. When her suffering is severe, she said, she goes into the bush by herself. There she prays to Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit in the manner she learned in the Pentecostal church. “No one in the Catholic church prays like that,” she added.

“Like how?” I asked.

She closed her eyes and placed her right hand atop her head, a bodily gesture indeed distinctive of prayer in the ADA. Preachers and prayer agents place their hands atop the head of the prayer recipient while yelling for demons to vacate the person’s body: “This body does not belong to you! Remove this sickness! Take it far from here!” Then they scream in rapid succession—“Out! Out! Out!”—thrusting their hands outward, with each command, from the prayer recipient’s head.

Without anyone to so expel the demons afflicting her, Neuza devised a way to do it for herself. That this required retreat into the bush owes to the intensity of Pentecostal prayers: forceful and hortatory, never hushed or subdued. Hence the need to be well out of her uncle’s earshot, just as we now needed to be.

I had never before heard a story like that of Neuza, simultaneously estranged from Pentecostalism by the leaders of the church and barred from it by the leader of her family. Her ability to improvise a solution to her predicament fascinated me. She managed to turn her double-marginalization into a position of privilege: able to do both the Pentecostal prayers prohibited by her family *and* the traditional practices prohibited by Pentecostalism. Later I learned that Neuza was not unique in this. There were many cases of women forced by their husbands, and if not their husbands then their maternal uncles, to renounce some aspect of their

religious repertoires. One woman in the district capital told my wife she converted to Islam after marrying but sang herself to sleep with the Catholic hymns of her childhood, particularly on occasions of physical abuse she suffered in that, her first marriage. What lies behind these stories of women under duress, women whose religious options are curtailed by the men in their lives? How to explain their ability to be religious without inhabiting institutional religious structures? What, if anything, might this have to do with their own assent to the dictum that “Makhuwa women have no religion”?

### **Women in Makhuwa Society**

The first step toward answering these questions requires tracing the history of gender relations among the Makhuwa. Not unlike the similarly marginal, non-state hill peoples of southeast Asia written about by James Scott, Makhuwa societies have long been marked by “a rough egalitarianism, which, not incidentally, includes a relatively higher status for women than in the valleys” (Scott 2009: 19). The signs of patriarchy discussed above must be regarded as relatively recent, brought about largely by colonial-era shifts toward centralized authority in nearly all social spheres. Most consequential have been the introduction of world religions, the formalization of education, and the infusion of market economies. Yet even in the aftermath of such modernization/masculinization trends, evidence available to me as late as 2012 disclosed the kinds of female power and authority that appear to have once been commonplace.

Descent and social structure throughout the interiors of northern Mozambique, different from in the south, central, and coastal regions, have been and continue until today to be



matrilineal; further, among the Makhuwa specifically, residence patterns are matrilineal.<sup>1</sup> Such factors point to what Ifi Amadiume (1997: 71-88), theorizing African feminism from a broad array of evidence across the continent, refers to as matricentric production units and matriarchic ideologies. Of course, female-based social organization alone does not translate into economic or political power. Suggesting a degree of matriarchy among the Makhuwa is their unique institution of the *apwiyamwene* (Lerma Martínez 2008: 66; Arizcurinaga Zeballos 2008). Frequently translated into Portuguese as *rainha* (queen), the *apwiyamwene* is in fact not the spouse of the chief (*mwene*) but a consanguineous member of his matriline. The most powerful woman of a clan or village, she functions if not as co-chief with the *mwene* then certainly as principal counselor on matters of governance, administration, and succession. She also officiates at such public rites as female initiation and community *makeya* offerings. With the formalization of customary authority by FRELIMO in the post-war period, the local chief has come to be considered the sole recognized authority, thereby reducing the significance of the *apwiyamwene*. Yet, remarkably, these local chiefs are sometimes women, as M. Anne Pitcher (1996a: 28) observed in her mid-1990s research in Makhuwa districts of Nampula province. That such a woman—the niece of a deceased chief—is only appointed in the absence of nephews diminishes only slightly what must still be considered the exceptional quality of women’s political authority among the Makhuwa.

Similarly, in the domestic sphere, women have long been the owners or, better, stewards of both land and household. At the conclusion of most visits to family compounds, I would offer a token of gratitude for my hosts’ time and hospitality, usually small bags of salt or bars of soap. To villagers living at a distance from markets and lacking money to spend at them anyway, these

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<sup>1</sup> See Claude Geffray’s exhaustive study of Makhuwa matrilineality (Geffray 1990b).

seemingly meager gifts were always appreciated. Most times I handed the gift to my interlocutor—the male head of the compound—who would then call his wife close and hand it off to her. This was not initially surprising; I could understand why males not responsible for cooking and cleaning would pass the items I had to give onto the person charged with those chores. Surprising were the occasions when I had already exhausted my supply of gifts, when all I could offer was a crude quantity of cash, and yet the same handoff occurred. Just as before, my conversation partner would receive my gift and immediately proceed to call over his wife who would pocket the coins or bills in a small cloth pouch tucked into her *capulana* garment.<sup>2</sup> Paulino acknowledged, when I asked about this practice, that the same transaction occurred at his home with the money I paid him for his research assistance. His wife, he told me, is the *capitaz* of the compound: “She controls everything. The man brings home fish or cloth or whatever, and hands it over to the woman.” Paulino’s use of particularly colonial terminology—*capitazes* were the Portuguese overseers of concessionary companies (Isaacman 1996: 55-58)—was revealing. It showed that even where colonial influence is pronounced, precolonial relations persist.

According to Giuseppe Frizzi, the relatively elevated standing of women, in both domestic and clan/village affairs, is grounded in Makhuwa cosmological principles that honor the feminine (see Frizzi 2008: 20-23). Applying a structural analysis to gender relations, he described for me the moon and night as paradigmatic symbols of womanhood. The lunar cycle, also the menstrual cycle, is how time is measured among the Makhuwa. One speaks of the rains coming in three moons, *mweri* being the Makhuwa word for both “month” and “moon.”

Additionally, the time of the moon, as opposed to that of the sun, is the time of contact with

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<sup>2</sup> Questionnaire data about the receipt and control of household income, collected by M. Anne Pitcher from Makhuwa districts in 1994, support these observations. Among the women surveyed, a majority reported seeing the income their husbands made and 75 percent reported keeping it until it was needed for purchases (Pitcher 1996b: 106).

ancestral spirits, therefore also the time of healing. While the principle work of men—cutting trees, clearing land, building homes, hunting meat—and the manual labor of women transpire between sunrise and sunset, it is exclusively women who lead and carry out the nighttime curative rites. When I attended my first *matxini* ceremony, for the expulsion of djinn spirits from an afflicted woman, I witnessed twenty or more women follow the female *namuku* (healer) into the healing hut shortly after sunset. The few men who were present remained outside, and I sat with them around fires throughout most of the night. Knowing something of my research objectives, they urged me to go inside the hut, to observe the proceedings up close. I eventually did so, accompanied by the husband of the *namuku*, but in my initial reluctance to violate the obviously gendered divide, my companion and assistant Leonardo found a way to tease me.

“What’s the matter, afraid of women?” he asked, to the merriment of the other men gathered.

“Yes,” I said, playing along. “The women are strong (*olipa*).” The men hooted with laughter while also nodding with delight, apparently impressed with my arrival at an important insight.

## **Rematriations**

As discussed in chapter three, it is during the nocturnal sessions of male initiation ceremonies—the time of the moon—that ancestral wisdom is conveyed. Among those wisdom teachings, none is more emphasized than the sacred power of female fertility, a lesson not only verbalized but embodied in the mimesis of menstruation that male circumcision is understood to be. The myth of Namuli, recited and reenacted in a wide range of rituals, similarly highlights the procreation

principle (*oyara*) identified by my interlocutors as one of two Makhuwa pillars. Etymologically linked to the verb “to menstruate” (*wula*), the very name Namuli suggests she-who-menstruates. When it is said, then, that “From Namuli we come, to Namuli we return,” meant is not only that each human originates from and returns to the sacred mountain, but also emerges from only to return to woman. Rematriations (to play on a term) recur throughout the lifecycle. Immediately following birth and throughout infancy, small children are tucked into a *capulana* sling strapped to the back of their mothers, childbirth thereby less a rupture than a repositioning, with little loss of bodily intimacy in the transfer from inside the mother to outside. In the crucial transition from childhood to adulthood, as already detailed in chapter three, return to the mother’s embrace is consistent with, even crucial to, the growth of boys into men. At life’s end, interments historically entailed placing the deceased in a curled position, knees tucked up to the chest, inside a curvaceous, rather than rectangular, burial pit (Ciscato 2012: 92): a symbolic womb which the body reentered precisely while the spirit (*munepa*) that once occupied that body was repatriating (rematriating) to Mount Namuli.

Marriage, to take one more example, brings us back to the theme of religious change. When a young man marries and goes to live with his new wife and her family, this does not prevent him from returning regularly to visit his own mother. He does so to escape relationship problems on the marital compound, to tend to health problems in his natal family, and to help celebrate, venerate, and supplicate the ancestral spirits he grew up with. Whenever a ceremony occurs in his natal home or village, he returns with contributions—of flour, of beer, of time and presence—to help ensure its success. However, the male whose proper abode is now on his wife’s compound, is equally obligated to *her* family’s ancestors. Without renouncing his natal ancestors, he has entered into what Frizzi (personal conversation) calls the “domestic religion” of

his wife. The consequent cosmological oscillations—the polyontological pattern of conversions and reversions explored in chapter four—occur regularly in the rural villages of Maúa district where matrilocality remains much the norm. In the realm of domestic cults, then, it is not the wife who follows the “religion” of the husband but precisely the opposite. Bound as much to the matriline of the woman he was born to as to the matriline of the woman he marries, one could say in this case that it is Makhuwa men, in fact, who “have no religion” of their own.

### **Refusing Religion**

But to what extent are the domestic ancestral cults “religions”? A primary objective of Islamic clerics in the nineteenth century, and of their Catholic counterparts in the twentieth century, was to replace ancestor-based traditions by either incorporating or prohibiting them. Missionaries deemed these traditions incompatible with devotional practices properly conducted inside the mosque or the church by the class of clerics authorized to stand front and center in them. Those clerics were, and until today remain, exclusively male. Meanwhile, the disparaged indigenous traditions were, and until today remain, precisely those in which women carry substantial influence and authority. The male priest and imam came to assume much of what was previously the reserve of the female *namuku* and *apwiyamwene*.

Along with a patriarchal authority structure, Islam and Catholicism brought yet another novelty: the category of “religion” (*ettini*). Today, these two traditions are universally and unproblematically regarded as “religions” even though this is not an originally Makhuwa concept. “In the time of our ancestors, we did not know religion,” said one elder to me. Of course, as discussed in chapter four, the absence of that term in the past does not vitiate its

salience in the present. Yet there is still considerable resistance among ordinary men and women to systematizing indigenous, ancestor-based practices. Except by some educated elites, they are rarely assimilated to the Arabic-derived *ettini* or its Portuguese-derived analogue *ereligiau*.

Significantly, as will be elaborated in chapter six, Pentecostalism shares with indigenous traditions their irreducibility to “religion.” I frequently heard Pentecostal preachers distinguish themselves and their followers from Catholics by declaring “we are not *religiosos*, we are *crentes*.” The word *religioso* could be rendered “adherent to a religion,” while the word *crente* signifies a believer, one who puts his or her faith or trust (*ororomela*) in someone or something else. Pentecostalism in this self-understanding is less a religion than a relationship, an existential connection with Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Pentecostalism also shares with indigenous traditions their affirmation of women’s voices and vitality. Throughout the world, women not only disproportionately populate these churches; their charismatic powers are recognized—even esteemed—within them. They are recognized insofar as men and women enjoy equal access to spiritual authority—the only requirement being that they manifest charismatic gifts such as speaking in tongues. Furthermore, they are esteemed insofar as they tend, cross-culturally, to have a greater propensity than men to trance and dissociative states (Brusco 1995: 81). Pentecostal services I attended often featured women in positions of authority: preaching, healing, prophesying, and leading praise music. On both matters, then—status as “religion” and status of women—Pentecostalism shares with indigenous traditions qualities that differentiate both from Islam and Catholicism, the two self-conscious *ittini*.

I learned to appreciate this distinction in a greatly embarrassing visit to my first village *makeya* ceremony. When I arrived at the *mutholo* tree, the ceremony had not yet begun but most

of the villagers were already gathered. Men were seated together on one side of the tree, women together on the other. This did not strike me as unusual; it was the same spatial divide—men on the right, women on the left<sup>3</sup>—evident in the Catholic masses I had already attended. (I would later observe that in the mosque, women sat not only separately from men but behind them; only in the Pentecostal churches was there intermingling—as much an example of Pentecostals’ flaunting of local customs as of the relative egalitarianism of their gatherings.) Having made the association with Catholicism, I deduced that the same protocols of the mass—men and women neither sitting amongst nor talking amongst each other—apply to the *makeya* ceremony. I proceeded to greet each of the men—bending low to touch their hands, asking each one, “*Moxeleliwa?*”—and then sat on the dirt ground at the end of the line, ready to observe quietly and unobtrusively the ceremony about to begin.

My plans were immediately interrupted by the yell of a woman on the opposite side: “He didn’t greet me!” Everyone laughed while I sheepishly stood back up and made my way across the grounds to extend my hands and my “*Moxeleliwa?*” to her and the women beside her, offering an apologetic smile and two-armed wave to the remaining women. These same women I would soon observe standing up, one by one, approaching the winnowing basket, collecting flour into their hands, crouching down at the base of the tree, and sifting the flour through their fingers onto a growing Namuli-like mound of flour. This is how *makeya* offerings are made to the ancestors, one person at a time making the offering while vocalizing the community’s pleas for wellbeing. Far different from the silence and seeming passivity women displayed in *religious* contexts I had hitherto observed, here they—more even than men—articulated with vigor and

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<sup>3</sup> This gender separation is written into the words that have come to translate spatial directions. The right hand is spoken of as *mono wolopwana* (lit. arm of man) while the left hand is spoken of as *mono wothiyana* (lit. arm of woman).

verve their petitions to the ancestors, asserting their right to receive their blessings as resolutely as they had their right to receive my greetings.

If it is only in the spirit-based, healing-centered traditions—ancestral and Pentecostal—that women retain the voice, authority, and power that have been customarily theirs, and if these are the traditions that do not constitute—as do Islam and Catholicism—“religions,” might this be why women accede to “having no religion” of their own? By agreeing not to “have religion,” it is possible that women effectively remove the ability of “religion” to tamp their ritual authority, to sideline the spiritual prestige and power that have long been theirs. In this sense, women’s endorsement of the phrase “Makhuwa women have no religion” may be quite the opposite of internalized oppression. Women may have no problem being without religion not because they see themselves as inferior to men but because those things they recognize as “religions” have never done much to recognize them. Meanwhile, in the indigenous and Pentecostal traditions that barely register as religions, women’s presence is not only recognized but to a considerable degree esteemed. Catholicism and Islam would more effectively marginalize women only if women had not already found ways to marginalize them.

Even if women did enjoy more authority in the self-conscious *ittini*, they may content themselves to leave these to the men. Institutional Islam and Christianity are highly relevant for engagements with state actors and regional collaborators, but not so much for engagements with the ancestors, *djinn*, and, nowadays, the Holy Spirit who govern everyday affairs. In a world where the state, market, and civil society are derelict at worst and absent at best, to be Muslim or to be Christian is to assume a primarily public identity that borders on irrelevant. On the other hand, in pursuing health, sustenance, and security for oneself and one’s household—in fulfilling,



in other words, the duty of *capitaz*—there are far more important matters with which to concern oneself than which “religion” one does or does not have.<sup>4</sup>

## Schools and Markets

With the world religions came not only the category of religion and the ideology of patriarchy but also the formalization of education. Nicodemus, a philosophy instructor in Maúa’s top secondary school and a respected intellectual, noted that the first generation of converts to Catholicism, of which there were many, came to the faith in schools run by the Catholic missions. The coincidence of religion and schooling is widely recognized. The same elder who told me there was no religion in the time of the ancestors added, “And they didn’t have school. The schools came with the religions and people saw that to read is good, to study is good, because something that is written is never forgotten.” Islam and Catholicism are locally referred to not only as the two *ittini* (religions) but as the two *ilivru* (books). That ancestral traditions and Pentecostalism fit so uneasily in the category of “religions” may owe to their being less textual than oral, less cognitive than experiential.

Different from at rituals of initiation—which always include one for girls and one for boys—the educational programs of mission schools, as well as of Quranic schools and post-independence government schools, virtually excluded girls. This is reflected in adult literacy rates. While only 26% of adult males in Maúa district could read or write in 1997, the last year of

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<sup>4</sup> Women’s relative indifference to “religions” may find its parallel in their attitudes toward “tribes” and ethnicities. These too were colonial constructions in which men, more than women, saw reason to invest. Leroy Vail notes, among the Tswana, a striking echo of the Makhuwa proverb upon which this chapter focuses, and offers an assessment that supports my own: “Ethnicity’s appeal was strongest for men, then, and the Tswana proverb to the effect that ‘women have no tribe’ had a real – if unintended – element of truth in it” (Vail 1989: 15).

gender-specific census data, an astoundingly low 6% of adult females could (*Perfil do Distrito de Maúia* 2005: 12). Even compared to Mozambique as a whole, whose combined adult literacy rate then stood at 40% (Firmino 2001), literacy rates were dire in the district. But if they were bad for men, they were deplorable for women.

Given their privileging of boys, formal schooling joined the institutional religions with which the first schools affiliated in elevating the status of men relative to women. As important as mission schools were for national politics—in helping foster decolonization movements in Mozambique (Cruz e Silva 2001) as elsewhere—they were just as important for local and family politics, for reconfiguring relations between men and women. This is not to say that women were opposed to or failed to benefit from these changes. Many mothers encouraged their sons to attend the mission schools and exerted tremendous effort to make their attendance possible. Furthermore, one must acknowledge the ability of those few girls exposed to formal education to use their acquired skills to break out of gendered social expectations (Sheldon 2002: 79-113). None of this, however, diminishes the fact that vast disparities of opportunity existed and, despite recent strides toward greater equity, have persisted.

A compelling argument can be made that girls' and women's lack of schooling points up not an absence but a presence, the presence of an alternative way of being and knowing. Formal and compulsory education is a contingent cultural invention with nothing necessary or natural about it (Harrison and Callari Galli 1971). Therefore, to normalize literacy, formal education's chief criterion of success, and to regard the absence of literacy as a negative—illiteracy—rather than an alternative—non-literacy—is to commit an ethnocentric fallacy. This accords with Scott's cautious praise of non-literacy among the hill people of southeast Asia. For them, the preference for orality has functioned as a means of evading the efforts of political authorities to

know, and thereby control, them through the fixed, indelible documents of statecraft: censuses, genealogies, tax records, and the like (Scott 2009: 220-237). Makhuwa women, largely excluded (though not by choice) from schooling and literacy are by means of that exclusion the more accomplished conservers of Makhuwa oral traditions and histories, just as they have always been the principal authorities in and on non-textual indigenous traditions. The richness of these oral narratives is their dual articulation of Makhuwa mobility: they record stories and histories of movement and migration, and they are themselves mobile, unfixed, open to alteration with every recounting. This openness and adaptability is the special reserve of women not only because of the prestige they enjoyed in bygone times but because of, not in spite of, the prestige they “lack” today.

What makes it hard to see female exclusion from formal education as nevertheless a travesty is the fact that along with western schools arrived an economic system based on wage labor for which those schools came to function as gateways. Education went from a means of joining the local community to a means of joining the wage labor market. “Education, yes,” Nicodemus said about the schools in which he grew up and now teaches, “but education that brings money, no? It is not education to be educated, because we have education in our rituals of initiation. It is education for a job.” Indeed, this is how many people I spoke with described the value of sending their children to school. Their hope for their children is that they go to school to become nurses, teachers, or government workers (although no small number expressed disenchantment, having themselves gone through the educational system only to come out unemployed and back on their farms).

In the post-socialist era of neoliberalism, the value of a salaried profession has only increased, money an ever-expanding medium of economic transaction. The shift from a gift-

based to a cash-based economy began in the colonial period but never gained much traction. Even in 2012, very little money passed through the countryside where I worked; no banks existed even in the district capital.<sup>5</sup> However, while the shift to a cash-based economy has been slow, it appears to be steady. This is evident not only in the increasing interest in government schools, sometimes at the expense of initiation rites, but also in the increasing reliance on cash crops, often at the expense of subsistence crops. Mozambique Tobacco Leaf Company (an affiliate of the United States-based Alliance One International) and other multinational corporate enterprises make their profits convincing subsistence farmers to dedicate large plots of land to the cultivation of tobacco, for which a price of 25 *meticaís* per kilogram of produce was promised in the year of my fieldwork. The downsides are many: few guarantees that after the work of cultivating tobacco the company will return to purchase the harvest or honor the quoted price, rapid depletion of the land due to the toxic properties of tobacco plants, and less land available for dietary staples such as corn and beans. One villager remarked to me that “tobacco brings hunger,” an echo of the phrase “cotton is the mother of poverty” spoken when similar colonial-era exploitation occurred at the hands of Portuguese concessionary companies (Isaacman 1996). Yet the concern for acquiring cash in an increasingly monetized society is palpable. I heard it in petitions to ancestors at many *makeya* ceremonies: “We come here to inform you that our products are ready to be sold,” I recorded at one. “All our products should sell well: tobacco, cotton, *ekhutte* beans. We come to request good fortune. The buyers should not cheat us. We come to you to request this.”

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<sup>5</sup> Some of those I spoke with remarked, half-jokingly, that it is the absence of banks and automated teller machines in Maúá district that explains why the prosperity theology-oriented Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, whose Lichinga congregations I discussed in the introduction, has not (yet) arrived.

No less than with the world religions, the shift toward a formal market economy has contributed to a shift toward patriarchy. Boys, more than girls, are the ones put through school, and as a result men, more than women, are the ones earning incomes. This has not wholly eviscerated the role of women as household managers, including money managers. Yet, tellingly, the pockets of female authority I observed in my fieldwork were almost always in those villages most marginal to the district capital and least integrated with western schools, labor markets, and the “religions of the book” As the logic of neoliberalism spreads, as social status increasingly correlates with earning capacity, those closely aligned with these relative novelties are the ones most likely to benefit. This has been, and appears will continue to be, men.

### **“To Have” vs. “To Be With”**

It is of no small significance that both formal schooling and market economies are conducted entirely in the national language.<sup>6</sup> The increasing infusion of Portuguese in a district where only one of five speaks it (14% of men and 5% of women)<sup>7</sup> has threatened in particular to alter local understandings of economic relations. For in the Makhuwa language, one of capitalism’s most basic concepts does not exist. “To have” (Port.: *ter*) finds its nearest Makhuwa equivalent in the compound word *okhala-no*, *okhala* meaning “to be” and *no* meaning “with.” “To have”

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<sup>6</sup> It is in fact, in schools, where Portuguese is introduced, which is why such a small percentage of the population where I lived speaks Portuguese. Most village schools do not go beyond the 6<sup>th</sup> year and so Portuguese remains the language of a privileged minority, even among men whose access to formal schooling has always been greater than that of women.

<sup>7</sup> Although these statistics, based on 1997 census data (available in *Perfil do Distrito de Maúá* 2005: 11) are somewhat outdated, still the vast majority of inhabitants in the district with whom I interacted in 2011 and 2012 were not conversant in Portuguese.

something, in the Makhuwa conception, is less to own or possess it than “to be with” it, and “to be with” others through it. As explained to me by Nicodemus:

I have a corncob, some corn here. This corn is not mine. It is corn for all. This is Makhuwa economics. Whatever I have is not mine. The other also has needs. What I have is for all. It is different in the western world: ‘I have in order to possess.’ This is capitalism. The Makhuwa is not a capitalist.

I asked what this means for the function of money, to which most people nowadays aspire, which he himself collects monthly from his work as a school teacher. “What is money?” he began his response:

If I have a good life, I will not need money. Money, the *metical*, is that object brought by the West. But do you think that before money, I could not live? Where is my economy? The economy is all of life. I have food, I have clothes, I have medicine, *pronto*. If I have all of this, do you think I will need a job? I will not.

He returned to his initial point: “The purpose of money is not to become more powerful. It is not, ‘I will have money to dominate others,’ but ‘I have money to maintain also the lives of others.’ This is what a Makhuwa conception of money would be.” Well-being, Nicodemus suggested, is measured not in the quantity of one’s material belongings but in the quality of one’s social relationships. It is not a matter of controlling evermore resources but of connecting ever better with others.

Among the Makhuwa, this intersubjective imperative extends to relations between the living and the dead. The real owners of the land are the ancestors; the living are but temporary guests. As temporary guests, as transitory inhabitants, accumulated wealth can be more a burden than a blessing. As discussed in chapter two, despite government and development workers’ promotion of *casas amelhoradas* (modern homes), villagers’ own preference remains for fungible mud huts, those which can be quickly built and painlessly abandoned. Particularly in a world so fraught with uncertainty, there is a premium placed on being “light-footed” (*oveya*

*metto*), on maintaining the agility of the turtle, an animal admired for its ability to carry its home on its back.

That ownership confers mobility rather than fixity is further reflected in two of the material “possessions” most prized among the Makhuwa. The first is the chicken, described by Nicholas Kottak (2002: 28-31) as both “one of the more valuable assets that virtually all the rural Makua possess” and as a “liquid” or “mobile” asset, chiefly because of its propensity to wander onto neighboring lands. Also of note is that chickens are raised and kept not only for consumption but for distribution, most notably to special visitors and at funerary rites. Another highly prized possession is the bicycle, one of the first purchases villagers make after securing a government micro-loan or enjoying a particularly successful harvest sale. Though still a rarity—in some ways a luxury item—the bicycle first appeared as far back as the colonial period, imported by migrant workers returning from Rhodesian mines. Distinctive about the bicycle is its facilitation of transport, the ease it allows for relocating oneself and one’s goods. Jemusse, on whose compound I stayed during my visits to Kaveya village, transported the doors and window frames he constructed all the way to the district capital on the back rack of his bicycle, a feat that never ceased to amaze me. Illustrated by the high value given to such “mobile assets” as chickens and bicycles is the principle that wealth is meant not to be hoarded but to be circulated, or to enable circulation. They reflect the Makhuwa economic ideal of “being with” over “having,” or of “having” as a means of “being with.” The real value of possessions is in their promotion of mobility and agility which, in turn are not ends in themselves but worthwhile insofar as they enhance one’s ability to be present among, and interdependent with, others.

With the introduction of markets, an economics of acquisition and accumulation has threatened to overtake this more traditional economics of commensality and connectivity.

However, the lexical preservation of “being-with” in the very translation into Makhuwa of “to have” suggests that the introduction of capitalism does not necessarily mean the success of its logic. This linguistic lesson is one that Nicodemus insists on with his students. Despite working within the school system, Nicodemus often expressed misgivings for the way it, particularly in the post-socialist era, promotes ideals of capitalist development shorn of local context. This serves to distance young people from their cultural roots. It “teaches them to become white,” said Nicodemus. By presenting Makhuwa history, traditions, and language as viable in the contemporary world, he aims to instill in his students the will to work against the ceding of Makhuwa traditions to Eurocentric and capitalistic modernization. He told me that his real hopes, though, rest in the uneducated masses, the non-literate peasants most marginal to formal society, to its markets, its schools, and its religions. They rest, in other words, with a large proportion of Maúa district’s men, and with virtually all of its women.

### **Refusing Religious Identities**

If “to have” something is “to be with” it, then the idea of “having a religion” in the sense of possessing a religious identity or affiliation is incongruous with Makhuwa grammar, not to mention Makhuwa economics. Yet the proprietary sense is precisely what men express when they say that women convert so easily because they “*have* no religion.” It also lies behind the expression *otxentxa ittini* (“to change religions”), yet another term for religious conversion. The verb *otxentxa* (“to change”) is a loan word from the English “to change” (*otxentxa* is pronounced o-chen-cha). This derivation owes most likely to colonial-era labor migrations to neighboring British colonies. That the verb *otxentxa* is, still today, used primarily in the context of monetary transactions (exchanging money, making change) helps explain why *otxentxa ittini* is itself used



by only a small subset of the population: the formally educated and economically privileged. It is almost never spoken by people whose lives and livelihoods are still largely marginal to formal economies. It is for such people that the already elaborated metaphors for religious conversion apply: *othama* (to move) and *ohiya ni ovolowa* (to leave and to enter).

The migratory properties of these latter terms suggest that what matters in religious conversion, as in life, is not “having” things but “being with” others. While “being with” others is predicated on the ability to move to where they are, “having” things tends to weigh one down, impeding rather than aiding motion. Thus, the religious mobility that underlies people’s propensity to convert (and convert again) is grounded in an ethic of connectivity—*okhala-no* in the sense of “being with”—rather than of acquisition—*okhala-no* in the sense of “having.” Most people I met—and whose stories I record in this dissertation—are not concerned with possessing religions or religious identities. Their concern, rather, is with coexisting with other human beings, with spirits, and with deities. Alice Walker (1983: 231-243) gave expression to this outlook when she shifted Virginia Woolf’s worry over obtaining “a room of one’s own” to the struggle of black women to connect with their foremothers and other uncelebrated predecessors.

It is no coincidence that women especially exhibit this way of being religious—of being-with-others religiously. As feminist theologian Michelle Voss Roberts (2010) notes in an essay on “multiple religious participation,” exclusion from centers of power carries with it at least one benefit: an ability to draw unproblematically from a variety of traditions, unburdened by the normative concerns and exclusionary logics of religious elites. If this holds for people marginalized, so much more for people doubly marginalized. The African-American women at the center of Walker’s womanist philosophy would be one example, confronted as they are with structures of both racism and sexism. Neuza, discussed at the start of this chapter, would be

another, confronted as she was with prohibitions from both family and church. In colonial and postcolonial Mozambique, the exclusions of women have been similarly multiple: from “religions” where men predominate, from schools where European languages predominate, and from markets where economies of acquisition predominate.

Makhuwa men (though by no means all of them) have been the beneficiaries of these relative novelties. They have been able to gain power in what had been a traditionally matricentric society. Seen otherwise, however, they have lost at least as much as they have gained. Women may not have benefitted materially from the boons of modernization, but they have also avoided assimilating to the modernist drive toward categorization, classification, and containment. They have thus been able to sustain a relationship to religion predicated not on possession but on participation, not on fixity but on mobility. If it is true that “Makhuwa women have no religion” and are therefore more likely than men to convert, that may have less to do with patriarchal subjugation than with particularly feminine, which is to say traditionally Makhuwa, capacities: to make moves (*othama*), to cross borders (*ohiya ni ovolowa*) and, thereby, to be with (*okhala-no*).

## SIX

### Being with the Holy Spirit

By attending to a part of the world where Pentecostalism has failed to grow explosively, we stand to learn something not only about that part of the world but about Pentecostalism itself. Shifting this dissertation's focus from the precedents to the particularities of Pentecostalism, I argue in this chapter that the dispositions so far presented as characteristically Makhuwa—mobility and mutability, eclecticism and experimentalism—are also fostered within Pentecostalism. Notwithstanding its official rhetoric of rupture, Pentecostalism is therefore better seen as restaging without displacing the characteristic convertibility of the Makhuwa people. No less than the indigenous material considered so far, Pentecostal practice and thought suggest that “being with” (*okhala-no*) a tradition—even the Pentecostal tradition—may entail going beyond it as much as it may entail staying within it.

### Binding the Unbound

It was on a Sunday morning, cool and dry as always in the month of June, that I had my first opportunity to attend an *eyinlo*, a dance ceremony to recall one who has recently joined the ancestors. The person who passed on—two years prior—was remembered as one who herself loved to dance. Her favorite was *nakula*, performed by dancers bent at the waist, swaying their arms and stomping their feet. Much of Kaveya village was now gathered to perform for her the very dance she so enjoyed. It was not the only dance; the *eyinlo* repertoire is vast (see Frizzi 2008: 1535-1675). This particular *eyinlo* was carried out by women, around 20 of them, many

with babies strapped to their backs. Men were also present, seated silently in the shade, watching and admiring. They would participate in between dances by singing invocations and pouring libations for the deceased.

Each dance had its own choreography, but generic features united them all. The women would first gather in the footpath beyond the clearing, behind the elephant grass. One drummer would blow a whistle and the beats would begin. In a single-file line, the women would enter the clearing, slowly and deliberately in a synchronized pattern called *wina wettaka* (dance walking)—left foot out, back together with the right; right foot out, back together with the left. These short, lateral steps created a sensation of the women drifting onto the ritual grounds, although there was nothing leisurely in the frenetic beats and reverberating ululations. When they had formed a circle around the drummers and the maize flour offerings in the center, the women would face inward and shuffle sideways, heaving their bodies, gyrating their hips, stomping their feet. While not all the dances involved bending at the waist—as did the *nakula*—the postures consistently tended toward inclinations, a gesture of respect (*nttittimiho*) and deference to the honored ancestor.

Bowed bodies and circular motions were key to every dance. One even added a figure-eight pattern (*eholi*): each woman circling the woman in front of her, then the woman behind her, all the while continuing to circumambulate the offerings and the drummers. Periodically each woman would twist her torso, first to one side then the other, a move given the name *opittikuxa* (to invert). In nearly every respect, the performance displayed circularity and redirection, turns and returns. At the end of each dance another single-file *wina wettaka* was performed, back onto the outgoing footpath where the dancers would regroup before entering again. These movements into and out of the ritual grounds seemed to be as crucial as, and continuous with, the movements

within it. Indeed, this Namuli-like dialectic—coming from and returning to—was appropriate for the occasion, a remembrance ceremony for a *munepa* (spirit) sent with an *esataka* ceremony to Mount Namuli soon after her death, now being summoned back with an *eyinlo* ceremony.

Remarkable about the ceremony was its festiveness, fueled no doubt by the pulsating rhythms and the plentiful *otheka* (sorghum beer). As we sat watching the dances, one man turned to me and asked, “In your land, do you have *eyinlo*?” I answered that we do not, that many would in fact consider it unseemly to dance and drink on occasions marking or recalling a death. “Like in the *Assembléia*,” he said and the others around him grunted in agreement. The reference was to the Assembly of God African (*Assembléia de Deus Africana*, hereafter ADA) church in the village, which everyone knew to condemn ceremonies that honor the dead.<sup>1</sup>

Everyone also knew this as the reason Jorge, one of the deceased’s very own children, was nowhere to be seen. He was a half mile away, at the ADA church alongside the main road. I knew Jorge well from my time spent in Kaveya’s Pentecostal community. He joined the small congregation after his wife fell fatally ill and recovered only through prayers at the Pentecostal church. The two eventually became among the ADA’s more active participants. Their commitment was well displayed by Jorge’s willingness to forego his own mother’s *eyinlo* for that morning’s Pentecostal service. Jorge explained when we talked later in the week that his absence owed to more than just a scheduling conflict:

We are prohibited from dancing *eyinlo* just as we are prohibited from eating *esataka*. We do not pound grain [prepare offerings]. We only help at the funeral, make our

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<sup>1</sup> In these churches, one is not allowed “to cry,” it was often said. It was an interesting word choice because while there was crying at *esataka* ceremonies, there was little outward display of grief at this *eyinlo*. Yet crying is in fact the etymological root of the word: *eyinlo* derives from the verb *winla*, to cry. While joy was on the surface sorrow was, even etymologically, close at hand. This is akin to Cornel West’s description of the blues sensibility born out of African-American slavery. Blues music expresses hope in a tragicomic register, seeking transcendence of dehumanizing situations not through repression or willful forgetting, but through an honest confrontation of life at its most sorrowful (West 2004: 19-21).

contributions to help with the burial while the dead person is still in the home, before going to the cemetery. But once the person is buried? No. We stay away from the ceremonies. It is not possible to eat *esataka* while the person is already dead and buried. He will not rise up again and eat it. Why didn't you give [offerings] while he was alive? Giving when the person has already died, this is an offense, an offense to the one who died. For this it is prohibited.

I had already heard Pastor Simões offer this justification, but always thought that while issuing and legitimizing prohibitions may be easy, abiding by them must be hard. I asked Jorge whether it was, especially given that it was his very own mother in this case receiving the offerings and dances. He answered by reciting a Gospel story, the one in which Jesus as a young boy strayed from his parents. He was eventually found “in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions,” (Luke 2:46, NRSV). When his mother demanded to know why he abandoned his parents, Jesus responded, in Jorge's rendition, “my kin (*amusi*) are those with whom I sit, with whom I do prayers. The one who birthed me and who does not follow my teachings is not my kin.”

I was thoroughly impressed, not only by Jorge's ability to select impromptu so apt a Biblical parallel to his own situation but by the resoluteness conveyed by the selection. Not everybody involved with Pentecostalism, Jorge was reminding me, is involved in the polyontologically mobile way that I had been hitherto observing. Some people, despite the Makhuwa predilection for being unbound, accept bindings. Some people do claim, and do seem, to rupture definitively from the past.

It is important not to omit this fact. As simplistic as it would be to deduce from Pentecostal rhetoric that all Pentecostals are antagonistic toward ancestral traditions, it would be equally simplistic to assume that *nobody* takes on an exhaustively and durably Pentecostal identity, that *nobody* refuses return to mother. Having acknowledged this counterevidence, the task remaining in this chapter is to show that far from refuting the thesis of this dissertation, it

actually extends it. People relate to Pentecostalism in concert with their pre-Pentecostal disposition toward mobility. This goes for those who relate to it passingly and reversibly. It also goes for those who relate to it permanently and reliably. This is because Pentecostalism, through resources internal to it, offers continuity with the Makhuwa disposition toward mobility. It sustains, even when it supplants, what I have been arguing is central to the Makhuwa lifeworld.

### **Firmness and Flexibility: Pentecostal *Othama***

The first time I met Pastor Manuel I was startled by the strength of his handshake. I had not shaken a hand so firmly and formally since leaving the United States. By then in the field for many weeks, I had become accustomed to hand greetings that were considerably more supple. The traditional Makhuwa manner of greeting is to cup both hands slightly in front of the chest and clap lightly two or three times, then in a fluid motion draw both hands, palms inward, up to the head, down to the heart, and further down to the thighs, finally letting them drop and open towards the ground. Spoken of as a gesture of *oxukurela* (gratitude), this greeting—performed by both parties—conveyed a meeting of two heads, hearts, and bodies in a gesture of conjoined circularity. Manuel's handshake was not unkind; through it, I sensed genuine generosity, exemplary of his unflagging willingness to talk with me and welcome me into the Evangelical Assembly of God (*Evangélica Assembléia de Deus*) community he led. But the gesture—a fully extended, tensely gripped, steadily pumped handshake—contrasted sharply with how everyone else offered greetings. It seemed out of place, not with the Pentecostal subculture he and other evangelists sought to create, but with the cultural milieu in which they were trying to create it.

The handshake was just one aspect of the body *hexis*—the socially inculcated movements, gestures, and postures comprising the performative dimension of *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977: 74)—that Pentecostal leaders expected of their followers. In one sermon I recorded, at a Pentecostal church service in Lichinga, the preacher excoriated consultations with traditional healers (Port: *curandeiros*) saying:

When you go to the *curandeiro*, before you enter, what do you do? You remove your shoes. Then you enter, inclined [he bowed down at the waist, eliciting knowing laughter], bend your knees. This says a lot. When you enter already bent down at the knees you are saying that he is your lord. By then, it's over.

The only one before whom genuflection is appropriate, the preacher went on, is “our God, Jesus Christ,” the result of which should be firmness and uprightness in all other encounters. Bowing down before God enables one to “stand up” to the devil: “The *curandeiro* wants you bowed down on the reed mat, but to get to the altar of God you have to climb. The devil wants you to stay down but God wants you up high.” To accentuate his point, he extended his body as he said it and leaped into the air. The contrast with the *nakula* dance I had witnessed at the *eyinlo* ceremony was stark. Stiff handshakes and upright postures were meant to accompany and exemplify rupture from such ceremonies. They instantiated the *firmness* and *decisiveness* of one's break with the past, the rigidity with which one should assume one's Pentecostal identity.

A reason leaders insisted on this bodily reinforcement of Pentecostal selfhood was likely their knowledge that many congregants did not assume a Pentecostal identity exclusively and exhaustively. Consider, in addition to the numerous stories already recounted, that of Abílio, a young man who held the title of Secretary of Kaveya village's ADA congregation. Not long before my wife and I took up residence in Kaveya, Abílio began a project, backed by a government microloan, to install and operate a diesel-powered grinding mill in a nearby village still without one. Soon after installing the mill, members of the ADA congregation came and



blessed it, imploring Jesus Christ to keep away all evil spirits who would love to see Abílio's project fail.

Four days later, it failed. The village chief informed Abílio this was because the recently deceased chief was unhappy that Abílio arrived on his land and initiated a new project without first making the requisite sacrifices. Without delay, and without trying to conceal it from his fellow Pentecostals, Abílio gathered a different group to re-inaugurate the mill. At the *mutholo*-tree shrine in the woods behind his mill, Abílio bent low to make the *makeya* offerings of flour to the aggrieved ancestor. News of this soon got to Pastor Simões, the Maúa district-level leader of the ADA. The next Sunday he traveled out to Kaveya village and issued Abílio a reprimand (*repreensão*), an official church punishment that barred Abílio from participating in church services. Abílio was instructed to continue attending but to do so without preaching, dancing, or singing. It is a telling punishment, suggestive of what really matters in Pentecostal ritual life. In North American mainline Protestant churches, such as the one in which I was raised, the norm is to sit still and, on occasion, stand still. Here, stillness was a punishment.

Pentecostal churches are most distinguished by their highly experiential, exuberant, and embodied forms of worship. Understood to be animated by the Holy Spirit, not prescribed by liturgical formulae, services are replete with dances, trances, prophecies, and emotional catharses. Of special importance is the charismatic gift of speaking in tongues (glossolalia), described by Harvey Cox as ecstatic utterance that exceeds linguistic intelligibility (Cox 1995: 81-97), its potency resting not in semantic meaning but in spiritual in-filling, the intense and immediate union with God. Not only do worship services allow for the Holy Spirit to fill one's body; they allow for demonic spirits to vacate it. Exorcism rituals entail multiple embodied acts:

walking forward to the altar, laying on of hands, violent shaking, and even physical sparring with the exorcising pastor.

Pentecostal prayers were never recited from one's seat, nor from a stationery standing position. They were recited, loudly and vociferously, while pacing back and forth, each person taking a few steps in one direction, then turning and looping back, only to begin again. A similar kinesthetic mobility was evident in the period of singing and dancing that, for up to an hour, began each service. Worshippers divided into four groups: the *mamá's* (women), the *papás* (men), the children, and the youth. The order was never standardized, but each group presented its dances in turn. The first group would organize itself outside the back passageway, the drumming would begin, and the dancers would shuffle in using the same measured, swaying steps (*wina wettaka*) I had seen at the *eyinlo* ceremony. With dancing and singing already underway, I had the impression that the groups did not enter in order to praise; they entered praising. Once at the front of the hall, three or four more songs would be sung, each with its own choreography of twirling foot patterns, steps forward and backward, loose arm swings, and twisting torsos. At the end, the dancers would exit with the same *wina wettaka* motion through the center aisle and out the back. The worship leader would then yell out—"Papás!" for example—and the next group would quickly organize outside, repeating the pattern.

For the participants, both the perambulatory prayers and entrance-exit dynamic expressed what Daniel Abrecht, in his study of Pentecostal kinesthesia, calls "a spirituality that cooperates and participates in the movement of God" (Albrecht 1999: 148). They seemed to me equally cooperative and participatory in Namuli-like patterns of circularity. I was struck by the numerous parallels to what I had been observing in ancestral ceremonies. Either way, given the highly

experiential nature of Pentecostal worship, Abílio's enforced silence and stillness were punishing indeed.<sup>2</sup>

The commonalities between indigenous and Makhuwa rituals—in terms of both the importance and the forms of movement—may not be surprising in light of one important strand feeding into the historical emergence of Pentecostalism. In the North American context, that would be the strand of indigenous African elements known to William Seymour from growing up in the nineteenth-century American south amidst African-American revivalist traditions (Cox 1995: 101). In the African context, Jacob Olupona (2002: 12), Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu (2005), and Ogbu Kalu (2008) have noted that what makes the continent such fertile ground for Pentecostalism is Africa's repertoire of healing practices, spirit possession, dance traditions, and oral storytelling. In both the North American and African contexts it is Pentecostalism's indigenous roots that lend the tradition its “fundamental attitude of flexibility and openness” (Vondey 2010: 15), a characterization of global Pentecostalism no less befitting the Makhuwa traditions I have been describing throughout this dissertation.

Yet there is a countercurrent born of another of Pentecostalism's inheritances, the holiness strand of European Protestantism. According to Allan Anderson, “These historical roots in the radical fringes of ‘free church’ Evangelicalism tend to create a certain fundamentalist rigidity” (Anderson 2010: 22). Since this and the experiential strand coexist, Pentecostalism is ultimately irreducible to fundamentalism (Anderson 2004: 258-260, Cox 2009: 199-202). The evangelical inheritance nevertheless introduced such aspects as Biblical literalism and moral asceticism which find expression today in the primacy given to God's Word in scripture and the

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<sup>2</sup> For more on ADA worship in particular, see Maxwell 2006b: 197-200.

prohibitions regarding illicit substance consumption, sexual misconduct, and the kind of “idolatrous backsliding” for which Abílio had to be punished. Not flexibility and openness, but rigidity and rationality arise from this inheritance. Pentecostal pastors—increasingly male, literate, educated, and Bible-centered<sup>3</sup>—tend to give it special emphasis, concerned as they are with placing discursive checks on their congregants’ otherwise pre-reflective bodily experiences. They want to ensure no mistaking of the Holy Spirit for an ancestral spirit, or of dances for Jesus for dances for ancestors. It is not that Pentecostal leaders neglect the body. As noted above, they are quite concerned to exhibit and encourage alterations of the body *hexis*. The aim of Pentecostal leaders, and the achievement of some of their followers, is inclined bows turned into straight-armed handshakes, circularity into linearity, moral laxity into moral rectitude. Most generally, this can be described as a shift from flexibility to firmness; most crucially, it is a shift from ancestral multiplicity to Pentecostal singularity.

However, these intended transformations are perpetually undone by the ritual kinesthesia of greatest importance to ordinary Pentecostals. The same Sunday morning that an *eyinlo* ceremony was happening for his mother, Jorge was a half mile away at the Pentecostal church: a far distance symbolically, if not physically. Yet at the same time that the *eyinlo* dancers were entering and exiting their sacred ritual ground, shuffling their feet and twisting their torsos, Jorge was entering and exiting his sacred ritual ground, shuffling his feet and twisting his torso. He was not only replicating, in one space, circumambulations happening in another, he was, through repeated patterns of entry and exit, performing a small-scale simulacrum of the kind of circulation I knew people like Abílio to make *between* those two spaces. If, as argued in part one

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<sup>3</sup> As Matthew Ojo (1988) notes with specific reference to the Nigerian context, much of African Pentecostalism’s origins are in college and university student ministries.

of this dissertation, circular conversions are an expression of Makhuwa mobility (*othama*), then even *within* Pentecostalism conversions never cease.

### **Being and Becoming: Pentecostal *Ohiya ni Ovolowa***

The particularities of Pentecostal theology join those of Pentecostal ritual in pointing to the tradition's internal dynamics. They reveal that Pentecostalism is less an accomplished state with which one identifies than a project of renewal through which one continually recreates oneself. Pentecostal theology shares with existential philosophy this accent on individual transformation, as well as an aversion to abstraction and systematization. It is nothing if not concrete, embodied, and engaged.

As discussed in chapter five, Pentecostalism in the Makhuwa context is neither fixed nor rigid enough to be captured by the term “religion,” a term the pastors I worked with actively disavowed. Religions were seen to be the impersonal and thus inconsequential traditions of Catholicism and Islam. These are what should be left behind, I once heard Pastor Manuel preach: “leave behind tradition, leave behind culture, leave behind religion. Our only salvation is with Jesus.” It is not the proper religion but the proper relation that matters in the Pentecostal framework. In this, as in the embodied rituals described above, Pentecostalism shares common ground with African indigenous traditions. Among the Dinka, for example, Godfrey Lienhardt argues that spiritual powers “cannot be understood by us if they are regarded as referring to theoretical ‘beings’ whose existence is posited, as it were, before the human experience to which they correspond” (Lienhardt 1961: 169).

The injunction I often heard preached in sermons—“Have faith, don’t believe!” (“*Crer, não acreditar!*”)—conveys much the same message. Suggested here is the same distinction Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1977) draws between rational and relational notions of belief. Prior to the Reformation and the Enlightenment, belief in the sense of rational assent to propositional truths was not central. To recite the “Credo” in medieval liturgies evoked “I believe” not in the sense of judging God to exist in the face of uncertainty but in a sense closer to its Latin etymology. According to Smith, “*Credo* literally means, ‘I set my heart’ (from *cor, cordis*, heart...). In St. Thomas Aquinas... this verb means to pledge allegiance, to commit oneself, to give one’s loyalty” (Smith 1977: 41). Smith’s compelling argument is that naturalizing a particularly modern and European category has led to grave misunderstandings of the religious worlds of people outside the modern West. For them, belief is more like faith (Smith 1979), a performance of trust within a relation of intimacy.<sup>4</sup>

This sense is preserved in Pentecostalism’s encouragement of a commitment with the heart more than with the mind, of fidelity not to the tradition but to one’s divine partners. Pentecostalism’s affective and existential qualities have been amply documented. Cox (1995: 5) describes it as being “about the experience of God, not about abstract religious ideas” and George Saunders (2010) sees in Pentecostalism a critique of the logocentric privileging of reason over emotion. Pentecostalism’s irreducibility to rational beliefs corresponds to its refusal of

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<sup>4</sup> Anthropologist Mary Steedly (1993: 34-35) offers a nice illustration of this point from her fieldwork in Sumatra. When asked by her interlocutors a question as to whether she believes in spirits, Steedly reports struggling to answer honestly without insulting those who did so believe. Gradually she realized the question was not whether she affirms the existence of the spirits, but whether she trusts them. In enchanted worlds, such as that of fundamentalist Christians for whom “supernatural reality is a fact” (Harding 2000: 36), the question of whether one affirms the reality of the divine is moot. What really matters is whether, and how, one relates to it.

reification. Beliefs are easily rendered belief systems<sup>5</sup> and so the fact that one must speak of “Pentecostalism beyond belief” (Englund 2007) supports the ways in which Pentecostalism, like Makhuwa indigenous traditions, is more an existential relationship than an autonomous religion.

Pentecostalism’s de-emphasis on reason and intellect connects it not only to the existentialist but to the pragmatist aspects of the indigenous Makhuwa lifeworld. By stressing, as they do, the therapeutic powers of Jesus, pastors present him as a new, but much more efficacious, healer (Portuguese: *curandeiro*; Makhuwa: *namuku*). I never heard a sermon encouraging listeners to “trust in Jesus” in spite of the difficulties, but always to “have faith and be cured.” This is a high-risk proposition, creating clear expectations that, in so medically perilous a context, cannot always be met. Thus, when miracle healings do not transpire one must, by the pastors’ own logic, try something else that may. Although rationalizations abound for why a prayer may go unanswered, people are less likely to detain themselves figuring out what they could have done differently than to avail themselves of something else in their healing repertoire. Thus, Pentecostalism becomes one more element in the plural medical field. People will stay with a healer—whether a *namuku*, another *namuku*, a biomedical physician, or Jesus—as long as he or she heals. When the healing stops, so too do the consultations. By presenting itself as a solution to problems as much as it does as an ideology or an identity, Pentecostalism fits seamlessly into this approach to wellbeing that the Makhuwa call *wasasa ekumi* (see chapter four).

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<sup>5</sup> According to Smith, the Reformation-inspired transformation of belief into a propositional assertion helped usher in a conception of religion as a system—a “belief system”—which came to be “a concept of polemics and apologetics” premised on the essential incompatibility of one “belief system” and another (Smith 1963: 42-43; Smith 1979: 120). Talal Asad similarly argues that the elevation of belief over practice is what made it possible to conceptualize religion “as a set of propositions to which believers gave assent, and which could therefore be judged and compared as between different religions” (Asad 1993: 40-41).

In fact, certain attitudes of Pentecostal pastors promote it. I once heard Pastor Simões boast about baptizing, at a single all-night service, five people who had never before been “saved by the Spirit.” It was an impressive claim, but one wonders about retention in such situations. Compared with the Catholic church (where years of catechesis precede baptism) and the Islamic mosque (with its own Quranic schools), one notes a dearth of attention to intellectual formation and doctrinal instruction within Pentecostalism. As argued in chapter five, this is one of the reasons Pentecostalism attracts women, the unschooled, and others on the margins of society. Such people can be not only baptized in the Holy Spirit, but empowered by it to preach and teach. The qualifications—experiential more than cognitive—are universally and almost instantaneously accessible, not the reserve of a privileged elite with time and resources to procure formal credentials.<sup>6</sup> Yet if the threshold of entrance into the church and the benchmark for elevation within it are so low, so too must be the threshold of exit. The borders of the Pentecostal world, permeable as they are, do not displace but coexist with the pragmatic and existentialist approach explored here as well as with the ritual movements—of ingress and egress—explored above. The consequence of this coexistence is the same as that already argued in chapter four: an *engaged pragmatism*, a border-crossing propensity, a capacity to leave and to enter (*ohiya ni ovolowa*).

Even for those who, by all appearances, enter without ever leaving (people like Jorge), they too are offered opportunities—indeed are required—to enact this interplay of entrances and exits, rises and falls. Simon Coleman (2003) refers to it as “continuous conversion” and Diane Austin (1981) as being “born again... and again and again.” In a Pentecostal service I attended in

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<sup>6</sup> This is not to underestimate the bodily training and spiritual preparation that are required of participants in Pentecostal churches. These can be, as Tanya Luhrmann (2012) has argued, quite rigorous and demanding. Nevertheless, they are bestowed more by acts of submission than by drawn-out processes of intellectual formation and therefore make for a more frictionless point of entry.



Lichinga, I heard a preacher describe the problems for which his listeners were seeking solutions this way: “Your health is not good, your finances are tight, your marriage is not going well.” It struck me that these are effectively problems of health, wealth, and relational wellbeing that are interminable and ultimately irresolvable. One may achieve a temporary respite but problems endemic to the human condition will never cease. Therefore, within Pentecostal thought, which conceives the Devil as perpetual tormentor, being rescued from one baleful episode is no guarantee of lasting serenity. Damnation always follows on the heels of salvation. Despite the ideology of a singular rupture point and the ideal of arrival at a sanctified state, much more at play are processual change and perpetual struggle. The closing prayer of that service included the line, “and may the evil spirits leave and never return.” That the pastor followed this with an announcement about the next service—“Come back on Wednesday at 6pm”—showed he had no expectation his prayer would actually be answered, no illusion that evil spirits could be banished once and for all.

While certain existentialist aspects of Pentecostal theology encourage participants to relate to it pragmatically, others postulate salvation as provisional. Either way, the committed Pentecostal finds himself or herself in a state of perpetual oscillation: between an inside and an outside, between being and nothingness. It is in the interplay of these extremes that one may locate the dynamism of the tradition. *To be* Pentecostal is to engage in the never ceasing process of *becoming* Pentecostal.

## Connection and Kinesis: Pentecosal *Okhala-no*

Despite the fact that seven of its twenty lectures are devoted to conversion, William James' classic *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1882) has yet to be robustly taken up in social scientific studies of religious conversion. More commonly, James is dismissed just as soon as he is mentioned. This may owe to his unusually sympathetic stance—born out of his philosophical pragmatism (James 1975)—towards religious practitioners and their theological claims. Explicitly, James is critiqued (i.e., Hefner 1993: 28) because of the individualism in his definition of religion: “the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude” (James 1882: 31). By making religion primarily a matter of the isolated individual, James appears to leave out the formative role of language and beliefs, of cultural and historical contexts (see Gallagher 1990: 11-38).

But it is important to consider James's definition of religion in its entirety, to note that he is interested not just in individuals “in their solitude,” but individuals “in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine” (James 1882: 31). Conversion is, for James, the shift of religious ideas previously peripheral in consciousness to the center (James 1882: 196). Entailed here is a view of human consciousness as embedded in wider fields, the center and periphery of which continually oscillate and interchange. The name we give these fields—which may include the socio-cultural as much as the psychological and cosmological—is inconsequential as it matters less whether our language captures the ineffable, what James prefers to label, with intentional vagueness, “the more” (James 2003: 37) than how we reckon with it and relate to it. It is thus crucial for understanding James' theory of conversion that one attend not only to the first clause but to the second clause of

his definition of religion: not only to individuals “in their solitude,” but to individuals “in relation.”

Such a reconciliation of self and other, of the one and the many, is also a key concern of Pentecostal theologians. Discussing the classical theological doctrine of the Trinity, Amos Yong works to bring a specifically pneumatological framework to bear.<sup>7</sup> Accordingly, Yong calls special attention to the capacity of the third element of the Trinity—the Holy Spirit—to serve as a bridge and connection for and between it and the other two (Yong 2002: 49-82). The Holy Spirit clarifies and instantiates the relational interplay of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the unity obtained in diversity. The Trinitarian elements are not, Yong argues, independent and autonomous, but interpenetrating and reciprocally engaged, each having its being in the others. The generating force of this inter-existence is the fluidity and mobility of the unconfined Holy Spirit. Thus, “the relational logic of pneumatology translates into a relational trinitarianism” (Yong 2002: 57).

No less than for Yong’s pneumatology, relationality and connectedness lie at the core of James’s radical empiricism. What matters is not the abstracted poles of the relation but the relation itself, the connection of the individual to wider fields of being. “Life is in the relations as much as in the terms connected; often, indeed, it seems to be there more emphatically” (James 2003: 45). This is the crux of James’ philosophy which he applies to religious experience as to everything else. Neither the abstract nor the particular, neither subject nor object, neither the collective nor the individual can be considered in isolation, but only in terms of their intersections and interconnections.

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<sup>7</sup> Pneumatology (from the Greek *pneuma*, meaning “breath”) is that branch of Christian theology dealing with the Holy Spirit.

Connectedness, however, is not fixedness. It is not a force of stagnation, but a generator of motion, of “the immediate flux of life which furnishes the material to our later reflection with its conceptual categories” (James 2003: 49). The intellectual operations of abstraction and nominalization are what introduce fixity. This is why both Pentecostalism and radical empiricism share a deep distrust of dominant intellectual traditions’ emphasis on rationality and discourse. These tend to break reality into isolated concepts—fixed and finished—while intuition and emotion bring out the ever-changing, ever-emergent spaces between, spaces unaccounted for by the analytic intellect. For James (1909: 263), “What really *exists* is not things made but things in the making. Once made, they are dead.” Similarly, Pentecostalism rebels against the completeness—the presumed closure—of God’s revelation. Uniquely among Christian traditions, Pentecostalism opposes cessationism, the theological doctrine that miracles and spiritual gifts ceased to occur with the apostolic age (Yong 2002: 247-249). The history of Pentecostalism suggests that speaking in tongues, healing, and prophesying transpire today no less than they were recorded to transpire in the Bible.<sup>8</sup>

If the flux of the Holy Spirit, like the flux of pre-conceptual experience, exceeds any particular point in time, perhaps it exceeds any particular point in space. The force behind Pentecostalism would then be untied to the institutional structures of Pentecostal churches. This is the most compelling implication of Yong’s relational pneumatology. Citing Jesus’s own teaching that the Spirit “blows where it chooses” (John 3:8, NRSV), Yong maintains the possibility, if not probability, of the Holy Spirit’s presence in the world, including even in the non-Christian religions of the world (Yong 2003). This may be, in theological terms, yet another

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<sup>8</sup> Instantiating this theology, the Friday Masowe Apostolics of Zimbabwe consider the written Bible—insofar as it represents the binding or closing of God’s revelation—inferior to and even an interference with the “live and direct” encounters they seek with the ongoing, dynamic work of the Holy Spirit (Engelke 2007).

point of contact between Makhuwa and Pentecostal worlds, a point where Holy Spirit and ancestral spirits meet. The latter, like the former, are nothing if not dynamic and mobile, ever migrating between the land of the dead and the land of living, into and out of people's lives. These movements are also understood to be indeterminate and unpredictable. Though *minepa* can be petitioned, they cannot be controlled. They, too, blow where they choose.

At the heart of Pentecostal theology and spirituality is the Holy Spirit.<sup>9</sup> A paradox exists within it, however: its simultaneous promotion of connection and movement. Against the common understanding that to be with (*okhala-no*) something is to be fixed to it, one might argue that to be with Pentecostalism is to be unfixed by it, that *being with* the Holy Spirit is consistent with blowing with the Holy Spirit. Connecting to phenomenological realities beyond oneself lies at the heart of religious conversion, James contends. Given his emphasis on movement and change over stasis and closure, James would be satisfied to know that connection, in Pentecostalism, looks a lot like kinesis.

### **Pentecostalism beyond Pentecostalism**

The preceding section titles—"Firmness and Flexibility," "Being and Becoming," and "Connection and Kinesis"—pair together conceptual antinomies. What the argument of each section reveals is precisely how the words in each pair belong together: the first in every case serves to qualify the second. Thus, to be *firmly* Pentecostal is to be flexible, to *be* Pentecostal is

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<sup>9</sup> "If there is one central theme in Pentecostal and Charismatic theology, then it is the work of the Holy Spirit" (Anderson 2004: 187). In spite of this fact, anthropological scholarship on Pentecostalism often gives it short shrift. Even those who bother to engage theological matters rarely touch on the particularities of Pentecostal theology as opposed to, at best, an over-generalized Christian theology. Joel Robbins, for example, engages John Milbank (Robbins 2006) and Alan Badiou (Robbins 2010b) extensively and compellingly, though neither theologian works out of the Pentecostal tradition nor is claimed by Pentecostal theologians as representative or even relevant.

to be ever becoming, and to connect to Pentecostalism is to journey with its kinetic Holy Spirit. Even people, like Jorge, who align themselves with Pentecostalism's rhetoric of rupture, people who can be said to "be" Pentecostal or "to be with" (*okhala-no*) the Pentecostal tradition, are not static and fixed as a result. They are not well captured by the identity label "Pentecostal" because to be Pentecostal is to be irreducible to a Pentecostal self. Movement, change, and circularity are internal to, indeed constitutive of, the tradition. Perhaps uniquely within contemporary Christianity, Pentecostalism promotes movement and dynamism from within, maintaining a *practical* experimentalism in spite of its *ideological* conservatism.

Movement and dynamism are not discouraged by the more ideologically driven leaders of Pentecostal churches. Even with their firm handshakes and upright postures, pastors dance only slightly less ecstatically than their congregants. They speak in tongues and roll on the floor, they jump, they cry, and they shout. None of this Dionysian excess is inappropriate, they would say. If done within the confines of the church, under the auspices of the Holy Spirit, they are the truest signs of grace. Recent research, notably a volume of essays collected and introduced by Martin Lindhardt (2011a), has valuably called attention to these experiential qualities of Pentecostalism, deploying theories of embodiment as a challenge to conventional approaches to the study of religion that focus on formalized meanings and systematized beliefs.

In making the body his analytic point of departure, Lindhardt draws from both phenomenology and Pierre Bourdieu's practice theory, but in fact attends much more to the latter. Lindhardt finds especially useful Bourdieu's definition of *habitus* as "systems of durable, transposable dispositions" (Bourdieu 1977: 72). "The adjectives 'durable' and 'transposable' are essential here," Lindhardt (2011b: 19) expounds. "People do not 'take off' the ritually cultivated embodied and linguistic dispositions for experiencing the sacred and reordering the behavioral

environment, as one might take off a particular ritual garment at the end of a service.” Thus emphasizing the pervasive and enduring nature of specifically Pentecostal dispositions, Lindhardt highlights “the entrenchment of ritual effects” (Lindhardt 2011b: 19), their penetration into all aspects of the individual Pentecostal’s life.

It is important to note that while both phenomenology and practice theory bring the lived body into anthropology, they do so quite differently. Bourdieu in fact sought to distinguish practice theory from phenomenological subjectivism which he saw as over-privileging the autonomous subject (Bourdieu 1990: 42-51). While both phenomenology and practice theory call attention to the embodied nature of everyday life, the former does so by highlighting the indeterminacies of lived experience (Merleau-Ponty 1962) while the latter does so by highlighting the durability of dispositions derived from pre-existing social structures. In his suspicions about the autonomous subject, Bourdieu reserves the greater store of agency for objective, external forces. This over-correction (see Throop and Murphy 2002) is, I would argue, what has made him so appealing to the tradition of *cultural* anthropology that similarly tends to grant the structures or cultures in which individuals are situated greater deterministic force than individuals themselves.

Phenomenologists would have no problem recognizing the interplay of prereflective experience with “the multiplicity of cultural meaning in which we are always and inevitably immersed,” as Thomas Csordas does in his elaboration of a *cultural* phenomenology (Csordas 1994: vii). But they would recognize that multiplicity pertains not just to a single culture, but to the “multiple realities” (Schutz 1970), including the multiple cultures, in which an individual is embedded and has some say in choosing among. Phenomenology’s concept of the lifeworld (Husserl 1970), whose key feature is its irreducibility to any fixed or singular worldview

(religious or cultural), points to the repertoire of resources upon which people eclectically draw in their practical, everyday engagements, engagements that compel regular switches not (*pace* Linhardt) unlike how one might switch between ritual garments.<sup>10</sup>

From this perspective, it is ironic that the boundaries Pentecostals are known for blurring—between the inside and the outside, between the ritual and the everyday (Lindhardt 2011b: 19-21)—tend to be quite pronounced by those who study them. A truly phenomenological approach to the study of Pentecostalism could not confine itself to the study of Pentecostalism. Whereas cultural anthropologists in general, and anthropologists of Christianity in particular, stress cultural particulars predicated on discursive discontinuities, phenomenologists call attention to human universals predicated on bodily continuities: “While words and concepts distinguish and divide, bodiliness unites and forms the grounds of an empathetic, even a universal, understanding” (Jackson 1989: 135). Thus, the real contribution of the phenomenological turn in Pentecostal studies is to render Pentecostalism less autonomous, distinctive, and determinative than it tends to appear in studies defined as studies of *Pentecostalism*.

The argument throughout this dissertation has been that Pentecostalism and ancestral traditions are corporeally continuous in ways that defy Pentecostalism’s rhetoric of rupture. The Makhuwa are disposed toward transformative, mobile practices prior to encountering Pentecostalism, and thus converting to Pentecostalism is consistent with staying Makhuwa. The

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<sup>10</sup> Yet even if isolating particular cultures, deemed to be all-determining, the point has already been made that the two of relevance to this dissertation—the Makhuwa and the Pentecostal—are nothing if not (to play on a word) counterculturalist: experiential and therefore resistant to reification, unstable and therefore resistant to systematization, mobile and therefore resistant to fixation. As will be argued in the dissertation’s conclusion, if there is a durable disposition cultivated in the Pentecostal lifeworld, it is the same as that cultivated in the Makhuwa lifeworld: a durable disposition not toward duration but a durable disposition toward change.



most striking implication, however, has to do not with what precedes Pentecostalism but with what succeeds it. My argument is that the transient manner of being that brings people *to* Pentecostalism and gets reinforced *in* Pentecostalism may also lead them *beyond* Pentecostalism. In this sense, Pentecostalism, no less than Makhuwa indigenous traditions, is always undoing itself: enduring not by staying the same but enduring by converting.

The Pentecostal propensity for fluidity and liquidity, for portable practices and transposable messages, have been presented as key contributors to the tradition's global success, its ability to "travel well" (Csordas 2009, Meyer 2010). However, in northern Mozambique, where Pentecostalism has *not* met with success, the very same factors are nevertheless in play. As Robert Hefner put it in his brief but astute discussion of Pentecostal decline: "Pentecostalism has the distinction of being both enormously successful but also, sociologically speaking, protean and unstable" (Hefner 2013: 27). Being "protean and unstable" is precisely what allows Pentecostalism to meet the Makhuwa where they are—not at the level of ideology, identity, and a philosophy of being, but at the level of practice, existence, and a philosophy of becoming. But the fact that experimentalism and pragmatism are affirmed in so much of Pentecostalism makes of it a "revolving door" (Hefner 2013: 28). That which enables Pentecostal churches to rise today may be precisely what causes them to fall tomorrow.

### **Unbinding the Bound**

This paradox presents researchers with an important lesson, one increasingly needed in hyper-specialized academic milieus where subfields proliferate within subfields, where the demands of delimitation require that training in—or "conversion" to—one area of research entail rupture

from all others. Just as identifying oneself as a scholar of Pentecostalism would make one unlikely to go where the tradition does not thrive (i.e., rural parts of northern Mozambique), so too identifying oneself as an anthropologist of Christianity would make one unlikely to note the totality of people's multiplex lives. James, one of the few truly eclectic scholars in western intellectual history (Menand 2001: 94-95), might have called this the wider fields of being to which reductionist scholarship remains perpetually closed. In my attempt to do justice to those wider fields, to be as polyontological in my research as those I worked with are in their lives, I choose less to align myself with the "anthropology of Christianity," an academic specialization, than with people like Abílio, a man on the move. I close this chapter by trying to catch up with him.

In my final weeks of fieldwork, with the sugar-apple trees just coming into bloom, the time came to lift Abílio's reprimand. For the previous four months I saw him every week at church, but always seated silently in the back. This, again, was his punishment for propitiating the ancestors: no singing, no clapping, no preaching. In the ADA church, the lifting of the reprimand is easily the most celebratory of occasions. It is called the ritual of liberation. That Sunday, for the first time since he came out to issue the reprimand, Pastor Simões, the district pastor, returned to Kaveya village. After his sermon, he called Abílio to the front, placed his hand atop Abílio's head, prayed his typically thunderous prayer, and declared the period of reprimand over. "You are liberated!" he yelled, and I joined the congregation in applause and ululations. Abílio smiled his broad smile and, as the voices of all gathered passed from cacophonous yells to euphoric songs, he grabbed the nearest *nlapa* drum. He pounded away for several minutes, then set the drum aside and ran forward to join the dancers. The intensity and integrity of Abílio's devotion were beyond dispute. Anyone there that day, hearing him praise

God at full volume, watching him worship with all his body, would be hard pressed to say there is anything superficial about his faith.

Afterwards, I approached the church deacon to learn his thoughts on what had just transpired. We clasped hands and laughed heartily, still uplifted by the joyful mood.

“It looked like our brother was dead and now he’s come back to life!” I said.

“Yeah, yeah, yeah,” the deacon replied, too animated to bother dissenting. Then, with the subtlest rephrasing, he corrected me: “He was bound, and now he’s free!”

It was an important clarification. Undesired though death is, it is not resisted in northern Mozambique as intensely as it is in western societies. Death—a passage rather than a cessation—actually conserves mobility, the fundamental property of the Makhuwa self. “From Namuli we come, to Namuli we return.” It is therefore not so much that Abílio was dead and now “born again” as he was bound and now free, seated and now dancing, immobile and now mobile.

There is a certain irony to the fact that the district pastor came all the way from the capital to officiate at this celebration. For now back on his feet, Abílio will move again. It could be, as it seemed to be for Jorge, exclusively *within* the church and not at all on the ancestral grounds. It could be, as it earlier was for Abílio, *between* the church and the ancestral grounds. What threatens to leave pastors (and scholars) as confounded as they have ever been is that there is no telling where his next move will be. Abílio, too, blows where he chooses.

## CONCLUSION

“There is no question that Africa is on the move.” So said United States President Barack Obama on a 2013 visit to Cape Town. He was remarking on continent-wide economic gains, gains that promised to eradicate poverty, curtail endemic diseases, and overcome legacies of misrule (Obama 2013). The Economist and Time Magazine have recently purveyed this same message, both under the headline “Africa Rising” (“The Hopeful Continent” 2011, Perry 2012). Skeptics point out that Africa’s new wealth is far from fairly distributed, but operative for the narrative’s proponents and critics alike is the picture of a “traditional” past—marked by stability and continuity—against which a “modern” present introduces rupture and change. In this dissertation, I have sought to problematize such presumed antinomies—between tradition and modernity, between continuity and change—by exploring one of the most remarked upon forces of transformation in the contemporary world: Pentecostalism. My argument has been two-fold: that the fluidity of converts’ involvements with Pentecostalism, at least in northern Mozambique, refutes assumptions about its inexorable growth, and that this fluidity has “traditional” roots: indigenous rituals, metaphors, and histories that shape actors by inculcating not conservative dispositions, but dispositions toward change. Thus if it is true that Africa is now on the move, now rising, now rupturing, this is largely because it has never been—nor is it likely to ever be—otherwise. Much the same can be said for Pentecostalism. Its prospects for success among the Makhuwa, I argue, will depend on whether it adapts to Makhuwa traditions of change or, just as helpfully, reclaims its own.

## **Nativity Reborn**

In the scholarship on Pentecostalism, it is by now well established that Pentecostal religiosity is not well captured by anthropological models of hybridization and localization. With its Manichean worldview, it does, in fact, demand discontinuous conversion (Robbins 2007, Marshall 2009, Piot 2010), thus warranting the anthropology of Christianity's rupture theory of conversion. Among the Makhuwa, however, none of this is especially new. Numerous spheres of "traditional" life presume disparate domains and clear borders between them. A great deal of ritual effort is expended on establishing a plethora of distinctions: between men and women, the uninitiated and the initiated, the living and the dead, the village and the bush. Of course, such distinctions are regularly flaunted. Frequent traversals and reversals demonstrate not the absence of borders but their permeability, the way in which well-being is predicated on an interplay between closure and openness, containment and the refusal to be contained.

Pentecostalism plays on this double sense of borders. Preachers warn adherents to stay within the lines, not to "backslide into heathenism." Yet ritual practices contradict the rhetoric. For while there is a discursive divide between Pentecostalism and everything outside of it, the tradition's experiential and embodied dynamics reinforce more than they contravene the fundamental Makhuwa experience of the fluctuating self, a self whose well-being depends on transformations, and whose transformations often entail transportations. What is notable about the Makhuwa context is not so much the epistemological divide between Pentecostalism on the one hand and indigenous practices and beliefs on the other. What matters is that, despite the distinct domains, people move bi-directionally between them, oscillating as they always have with alacrity, nimbleness, and ease.

“Why do people convert?” This, the most common of analytical concerns, may not be the best question we could be asking. For it assumes that conversion is an anomaly. We generally conceive of religious conversion as the outcome of some calamity, whether personal or social. What my research suggests is that what appear to outsiders as momentous shifts may be experienced by insiders as unexceptional. As Edmund Leach wrote regarding the effects of merging polities on Kachin self-perception: “It is only the external observer who tends to suppose that [such] shifts... must be of shattering significance” (Leach 1954: 287). Ascribing shattering significance to religious change reveals at least as much about us as it does about those we work with. It bespeaks a bourgeois tendency to locate wellbeing in secure and stable identities, in tethering ourselves to something firm: brick homes, state centers, religious cultures. Yet might there be other ways to see things? Is it possible that there are people with a higher tolerance for “insecurity” and vulnerability, people for whom movement across borders, engagement with alterity, and exposure to the new are, despite their dangers, preconditions for wellbeing?

The normalizing of stasis over flux fits the substantive metaphysics that we inherit from Plato’s directive to fix our gazes on the eternal and the immutable. Since then, the western intellectual tradition has had a hard time dealing with the phenomenon of change. One of its more recent models, from the philosophy of science, posits the existence of two durable paradigms within each of which “normal science” occurs; the shift from one to another is occasioned by “revolutionary science” (Kuhn 1962). What my project offers is the possibility of paradigms that collapse the distinction between the ordinary and revolutionary, where movements within paradigms are continuous with movements between them. These would be

frameworks that facilitate their own piecemeal and experimental revision, that render transformations banal extensions of everyday experience (Unger 2007).

In anthropological terms, the cultivated dispositions Pierre Bourdieu (1977) calls the *habitus* may not merely conserve the objective social order. As argued in chapter three, Bourdieu at times gives that impression, coming close to asserting the determinism of social structures. Yet even if bodily dispositions more or less perfectly replicate structures, might certain structures have pliability and transformability built into them? Such structures would inculcate not dispositions *in spite of which* a “margin of freedom” (Bourdieu 2000: 234-236) remains, but dispositions toward mobility, dispositions toward discontinuity. In this case, people would embrace an experimental stance toward the world not against their conditioning but because of it. The consequent collapse of such antinomies as roots and routes, structure and agency, continuity and discontinuity could also reconcile the two Greek words—*epistrophe* and *metanoia*—that create what Pierre Hadot (1968: 497) identifies as an internal opposition in the category of conversion. Suggested by the Makhuwa case is that a return to one’s origin (*epistrophe*) might in fact be a return to a state of rebirth (*metanoia*), that to convert to one’s true self is to convert to convertibility.

The lesson in all this is that while scholars of Pentecostalism are right to point to discontinuity as a hallmark of Pentecostalism, it would be wrong to consider it uniquely so. The problem is not the foregrounding of radical renewal in and through Pentecostalism. It is the implication that there is something radically new about radical renewal. Robbins worries that anthropology’s continuity bias, insofar as it excludes a “theory of truly radical cultural change,” perpetuates the ethnocentric view of non-western societies as stagnant. As a corrective, the anthropology of Christianity “recognizes that people really do learn new things and cultures

really do change” (Robbins 2003: 231). This concern with novelty is commendable, existential even. But does the capacity to learn anything new require the presence of Pentecostalism or other aspects of “modernity”? Are there not endogenous engagements with alterity that prefigure (and inform) encounters with Christianity, such things as the experiences of migration, models of change, and rituals of transformation discussed in this dissertation? The notion that radical change initiates from such contemporary global forces as Pentecostalism may in fact be the ethnocentric position, as specious as journalists’ and politicians’ celebrations of Africa *now* being on the rise, *now* being on the move.

Perhaps surprisingly, it is Pentecostal theologians who give the lie to Pentecostal exceptionalism. For Wolfgang Vondey (2010) and Nimi Wariboko (2012) in particular, Pentecostalism is but an expression of such existential universals as creativity, freedom, and play. Like Ruth Marshall (2009), Wariboko also draws extensively on Arendt’s notion of natality, the capacity to begin things anew. However, unlike most social scientists of Pentecostalism, Wariboko refuses to confine natality to any single cultural or religious formation. This is in keeping with Arendt’s use of the term; she presents it, after all, in a book titled *The Human Condition*, a point seemingly lost to those who associate “born again” experiences exclusively with “born again” Christians. Thus, although anthropologists of Christianity have valuably challenged anthropology’s continuity bias and tendency toward culturalism, their assumption of Christian exceptionalism (see Hann 2007) with respect to discontinuity only recapitulates the problem. Despite recasting natality as “the pentecostal principle,” Wariboko much better captures the existential point when he writes, “The pentecostal principle predates Pentecostalism and is likely to outlive it” (Wariboko 2012: 4).



I present my research as confirmation of this crucial insight. At least in northern Mozambique, Pentecostalism does less to introduce natality than to reinforce a preexistent capacity for it. With its dances and trances, exorcisms and ecstasies, Pentecostalism restages without displacing the fundamental Makhuwa experience of the self as mobile and mutable. Despite rhetorical claims to the contrary, Pentecostalism is more an extension of than alternative to indigenous ways of being. This conclusion is not a simplistic return to discredited models of hybridization, domestication, and continuity; for what gets continued in this case is precisely the disposition toward *discontinuity*.

### **Pentecostal Intransigence**

This disposition manifests among Makhuwa men and women in different ways corresponding with three broad relations I observed them to maintain with the newly arrived Pentecostal churches. First, among the few who (appear to) commit exclusively and exhaustively, rebirth continues within the faith. Though abiding by the tenet of permanent and irreversible rupture, these people do not become immobile as a result. This is because the religion to which they convert is, at least experientially, a religion of renewal. In all the ways discussed in chapter six, Pentecostalism allows people who commit themselves singularly to it to nevertheless continue remaking themselves through it.

Secondly, a good number of people deploy their disposition toward mobility by oscillating between Pentecostalism and prohibited ancestral spaces. They convert, reverse their conversions, and convert again. These patterns of circularity are cultivated through Makhuwa mythologies of mobility—namely the origin story of egress and regress—as well as its histories

and its rituals. Those who relate to Pentecostalism in this passing and partial manner do so, therefore, as an expression of their Makhuwa selfhood. Yet it may just as well be that they do so as an expression of their Pentecostal selfhood. Patterns of circularity are cultivated through Pentecostalism's rituals of mobility—namely the dances of ingress and egress—as well as its existentialist theology and its doctrine of the Holy Spirit. No less than their Makhuwa analogues, these promote the kinds of kinesthetic experiences that may easily exceed the boundaries constructed by Pentecostal discourse. Whatever the source, this uncontained, fluid manner of relating with Pentecostalism is what I have spent the most amount of time exploring in this dissertation.

The relationship with Pentecostal churches I have least explored—perhaps unjustifiably so because it is by far the most common—is that of simple avoidance. The vast majority of people in Maúa district stay clear of the Assembly of God African (*Assembléia de Deus Africana*, hereafter ADA) and the Evangelical Assembly of God (*Evangélica Assembléia de Deus*, hereafter EAD). They never enter them, and if they do it is only long enough to confirm their disinterest. This reluctance to engage may be taken as a refutation of my contention that the Makhuwa eagerly experiment with any and all options available to them. They are not, however, eager to experiment with those things known to tamp their experimentalism. Analogously, as seen in chapter two, even the most well intentioned state-making projects to resettle bush dwellers alongside roads are perceived less as opportunities for development than as constraints on mobility: resettlement as imprisonment.

In the short time Pentecostal churches have been attempting to resettle people religiously in Maúa district, they have developed a similar reputation—not so much for demanding discontinuity (which in itself would be no problem) but for demanding the discontinuity of a

discontinuous way of being. Most people familiar with the discourse of Pentecostal churches, without even bothering to experience their countervailing rituals and theologies, simply avoid them altogether. They prefer to stay put, which is to say they prefer to stay mobile.

They prefer to stay put and stay mobile in one of the two religions that have been successful in the region, Islam and Catholicism, neither of which is ideologically opposed to the kinds of multiplicity with which people carry out their lives. As discussed in chapter four, this was not always the case. Both religions arrived in the region, not unlike Pentecostalism, with ideological rigidity and impermeable borders. However, both later abandoned their opposition to ancestral practices and embraced a logic more akin to that of the Makhuwa. Regarding similar developments elsewhere in northern Mozambique, Harry West suggestively remarks that the Makonde “did not merely ‘convert to Catholicism’; they also ‘converted Catholicism to themselves’” (West 2005: 126).

Catholicism and Islam are spoken of among the Makhuwa not only as *ittini* but as *ittini sa amaye* (mother religions). As such, they are additional variations on the theme of centripetal motherhood traced throughout this dissertation: release from mother always followed by return to mother. One may leave Catholicism or Islam—temporarily for the ancestral traditions or at greater length for Pentecostalism—and expect to be welcomed back with open arms.

The “mother” religions are so designated because have also come to be seen as *Makhuwa* religions. Pentecostalism, by contrast, has not. I sometimes heard it described as the church of the whites/foreigners (*ekereja y’akunya*) despite the fact that all of its pastors and members are African. Ironically, this designation is not given to Catholicism, despite its propagation through European missionaries such as Father Giuseppe Frizzi. But Father Frizzi, like the Catholic church, has come to be regarded as Makhuwa. He has learned the language (speaking it “better

than we do,” many say), participated in healing rituals, shown honor to the ancestors, and even revived initiation rituals that almost everywhere else are now obsolete. Affection for him is widespread, even my Pentecostal friends referring to him as *bambo ahu* (“our priest”). What Frizzi did, and what he helped do for Catholicism, is undertake a Makhuwa rebirth.

In a context where both the ancestral traditions and the religions foster inclusion and mobility, the biggest obstacle to Pentecostal success may be its reluctance to follow suit, its unwillingness to compromise as both Catholicism and Islam long ago did. This is the main reason the majority of people in Maúa do not even bother with the few Pentecostal churches present. Why would they when they can partake in other traditions that affirm, rather than deny, their mobile manner of being?

In light of all this, the future of an intransigent Pentecostalism looks bleak. It appears likely to remain a marginal presence—attractive to a few Makhuwa from the district who bring to it their polyontological mobility, and, of course, to *vientes* (newcomers) who were already evangelized elsewhere, likely where Catholicism and Islam never came to resonate so much with local traditions. This may of course change. As communication and road networks continue to improve, and as Maúa continues to integrate economically and politically with surrounding regions, the traffic of new people and new ideas may increase. More of the local population may venture beyond the district, there encountering ways of being they may bring back with them. Also, *vientes* may increasingly appear as teachers, government workers, merchants, and, of course, evangelists. If they one day reach the critical mass they lack today, these *vientes* may end up transmitting their bourgeois values of fixity, stability, and “having,” making their ruptured

style of Pentecostal participation more locally attractive than it has hitherto been.<sup>1</sup> However, for over a century various outside influences—Catholic missionaries and Muslim clerics, colonial authorities and postcolonial administrators, regional traders and multinational corporations—have been descending upon the local population without drastically altering the Makhuwa predilection for transience. A tipping point may one day be reached, but for the time being, this seems unlikely.

Alternatively, Pentecostalism may follow the path of both Islam and Catholicism in the region and assume for itself the Makhuwa priorities of mobility and mutability. This would entail the kind of missiological reversal that the worldwide Catholic church underwent with the Second Vatican Council. Bellicose as Pentecostal discourses of spiritual warfare are, such a reversal may not be farfetched when one considers that similar discourses, and demands of discontinuity, attended early Catholic missions in Maúa. Furthermore, unlike Catholicism, Pentecostalism carries within its origins and in the shadows of its discourse, a tradition of renewalism, a resistance to reification, and an aversion to centralization. By losing its characteristic animosity toward Makhuwa “tradition,” Pentecostalism would follow the lead of Catholicism but would be tapping into its own congenital charisma, its originating dynamic of renewal and rebirth.

Most signs, however, suggest it is moving in the opposite direction, becoming even more ideologically hardline than it already is. Historians of Pentecostalism have noted a shift that Max Weber (1978: 246-254) would speak of as the routinization of charisma: the dissipation of

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<sup>1</sup> A parallel story may be playing out in Islam, with merchants from coastal regions and even one I met from Somalia bringing to Maúa a more rigid, reformist version of Islam that, like Pentecostalism, opposes ancestral practices but also, like Pentecostalism, has not caught on. Were this to change, were Islamic identity to become more rigid at the same time Christian identity does, the result may be a polarization of Christian-Islamic relations to the point of conflict and violence. For disconcerting hints this may already be underway among the Makhuwa of urban and coastal Nampula, see Morier-Genoud 2000. Matthew Ojo (2007) has documented the deleterious consequences of clashing religious ideologies resulting from Pentecostal attempts to evangelize in the predominantly Muslim regions of Nigeria.

visionary energies and the rise of institutional bureaucracies. The founder of Kaveya's ADA church, the man who first brought Pentecostalism to Maúa district, told me he has become disillusioned with the church for this very reason, seeing its priorities change drastically in the course of his lifetime. He explained that whereas before pastors, healers, and prophets (all collaborating more or less equally) used their Holy Spirit inspiration to bring healing and security to the community, today the younger, more masculine, and more educated leaders are primarily concerned with enriching themselves and fortifying the institution.<sup>2</sup>

What began as a loosely structured movement that appealed to social outcasts has, over time, become increasingly exclusive and exclusionary. Robert Hefner sees this as a present and possibly continuing trend: "what was at first a non- or interdenominational movement with multiple authority figures... may give way to a clear denominational pattern of exclusive affiliation and strict or even authoritarian pastoral control" (Hefner 2013: 8-9). The argument that there is something new to this level of exclusion suggests that an earlier Pentecostalism made more room for the kind of experimental flexibility with which Makhuwa men and women conduct their lives. This possibility follows quite clearly from one theologian's observation that Pentecostal founders of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century—particularly Charles Fox Parham and Bishop J.H. King—were remarkably inclusive and open, tolerant even toward what they took to be the redemptive value of non-Christian religions (Richie 2013: 58-65). Against this history Pentecostal churches are, at the institutional level at least, becoming increasingly rigid, increasingly exigent of singular allegiance, and, in the process, increasingly discordant with Makhuwa sensibilities.

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<sup>2</sup> This man's story deserves to be told at greater length and I intend to do so in a separate article under preparation. David Maxwell (2006b) has thoroughly documented the shift toward bureaucracy, bourgeois respectability, and the gospel of money in his historical survey of the Zimbabwean Assembly of God (ADA's parent church).

## Pentecostal Conversion?

In Maúa, the process of Pentecostal routinization has culminated in the district's Pentecostal churches integrating with the local branch of the Christian Council of Mozambique (*Conselho Cristão de Moçambique*, hereafter CCM), a mission-oriented, ecumenical Protestant organization.<sup>3</sup> The local coordinator, Brother Peter, an elder in Maúa's only mainline Protestant denomination, happened to revive this branch, following a decade of dormancy, in the year prior to my arrival. I was able to attend the second meeting since this rebirth, when much of the focus was still on defining the group's mission and purpose.

It took place one Saturday morning, beginning at nine o'clock sharp, in an elegant building formerly owned and occupied by a Norwegian non-governmental organization. The pastors of the district's two Pentecostal churches were both in attendance, both wearing the same spotless finery they used to command attention and respect at their Sunday services. As much as at those Sunday services, I was struck by the force of their words at this meeting. "We are militants for Christ," Pastor Simões of the ADA said, "and our task is to battle against the devil and the people enslaved by the devil, the people who do not know Christ." Pastor Manuel of the EAD peppered similarly bellicose comments with such biblical passages as: "Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood" (Rev. 22:15, NRSV).

The meeting had the feel of a call to arms. The outsider enemies were identified as Maúa's Catholics, those who claimed to follow Christ but who continued to consume alcohol,

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<sup>3</sup> The CCM is the main Protestant ecumenical body of the country and, like the World Council of Churches of which it is an affiliate, does not include the Catholic church. Pentecostal churches are also not affiliated but in Máua, given the small non-Catholic Christian presence, the local convener, Brother Peter, has deemed it fit to break with protocol and invite participation by Maúa's two Pentecostal churches (ADA and EAD).

commit sexual improprieties, and worship “idols.” The archenemy was identified as Father Frizzi and his catechists for permitting such sinfulness, for concerning themselves not with the Gospel but with making the religious path as easy as possible so as to make their churches as populous as possible. Assessments of Maúa’s enslavement to the Devil interspersed with debates on how best to go about saving it, how to convert its inhabitants not necessarily to a particular religion but to a particular way of being religious—one that is unambiguously singular, exhaustive, and absolute. For three hours the meeting carried on like this, the heat of the rhetoric diminishing hardly at all as the heat of the day increased.

It was the starkest example of the mutually enforcing bureaucratic and exclusionary trends that have, in recent decades, conspired to betray Pentecostalism’s original spirit—the capacity for creativity, freedom, and renewal that Wariboko names “the pentecostal principle.” As a result of these trends, Harvey Cox argues, Pentecostals today “are facing a dilemma that they may not survive. At least they may not be able to survive it and still remain true to their origins” (Cox 1995: 17). In Maúa district of northern Mozambique, there are many reasons to wonder whether Pentecostalism will survive, but there is no doubting that the “pentecostal principle” (spelled by Wariboko with a lower-case “p” to uncouple it from institutional Pentecostalism) has always been alive and well. If the Pentecostal churches reclaim their latent pentecostal principle, they may yet come into their own among the Makhuwa. They may yet survive; they may even thrive. But it will take a massive conversion—not of the Makhuwa to Pentecostalism but of Pentecostalism to the Makhuwa.

There are hints this may be underway.

Energy levels were beginning to fade at that Saturday’s CCM meeting as noon approached. I expected Brother Peter to call the meeting to a close. Instead he told a story:



Let's say my mother has become sick. And at the same time she has become sick, my wife has also. I'm not around because I had to be away for a few days. On my way home, I meet someone who tells me, 'Hey, your mother has died and your wife has also died.' You're still on your way home. To which site will you go, the compound of your wife or the compound of your mother?

It seemed a bizarre story to tell, having nothing to do with the soul-saving zeal of the previous three hours. I asked Brother Peter afterwards why he chose to tell this story when he did. He said he was concerned about the fact that not everyone had been speaking up during the meeting. He wanted to end the meeting this way so that next time they will feel more comfortable contributing. Indeed, the discussion that followed—about balancing one's role in the natal household with one's role in the marital household—carried on with gusto and even, despite the doleful details, a good amount of joy. Provocation of palaver is one documented purpose of African dilemma tales. Another is that, by encouraging the articulation of multiple points of view, they provide a means of coping with, rather than forcing intellectual or moral closure upon, the predicaments of human existence (Bascom 1975, Jackson 1982: 32-67).

I was struck by how everyone in attendance, including the Pentecostal pastors and lay leaders, debated the dilemma intensely yet without foreclosing perspectives different from their own. One person's immediate response—"I will first go to my wife, out of respect"—prompted an equally immediate counter—"No, you have to go to your mother"—and a set of elaborations, for example: "That is your natal family. If not for them, you would not be here." There was widespread approval for that answer until others laid out equally compelling justifications for the alternative, such as: "Most important is to go to your wife because there you are already family, you have children. You have to be there to console your children." This and other reasons for going to the wife's burial were taken as seriously as those for going to the mother's. The tide of

the debate shifted, though with neither answer displacing the reasonableness of the other.

Whichever the provisional consensus at which we arrived, it was always inevitably undone.

The line of responses that generated the most enthusiasm attempted a reconciliation. “Now, between your mother’s and your wife’s, what’s the distance?” one person asked. “Yes,” another said in support, “ask about the distance.” The discussion turned to ascertaining this and other details, to fine-tuning the initially vague scenario so as to devise a strategy for attending both funerals, for solving the dilemma by dissolving it. Depending on the distance between maternal home and marital home, and on other contingencies raised for consideration, one could go to one set of kin to promise to return and make the expected contributions as soon as having done so for the other set of kin. This struck me as an example of what I have called polyontological mobility, of being in two places and being in them fully—not simultaneously (which is impossible), but serially. But in the end, even this line of responses was beset by too many unknowns for a definitive consensus to emerge.

Brother Peter allowed the good-natured debate to go on like this for some time before bringing it to a close with a smile on his face. “The thing is,” he said, “this story, this question, has no solution.” Everyone laughed, almost as if relieved to be reminded of the insolubility of life’s vexing quandaries, of the limits to what one can be expected to know and do in any given situation. As impassioned as the debate over this dilemma was, when it was over, everyone seemed content for having participated in it even without having resolved it.

It was a striking conclusion to a meeting whose tone, up to then, had been diametrically different. The dilemma tale diverged from what preceded it in being hypothetical, yes, but also in being pressingly existential rather than blandly theoretical. How to fulfill conflicting responsibilities arising from critical situations seemed a qualitatively different question than that

of which religion is true. The latter allowed for absolute certainties, while the former called forth indeterminacy. The latter demonized alternatives, while the former fostered space for them. The latter prioritized one relation of obligation, while the former suggested valor in honoring all.

Embracing and, indeed, reveling in the dilemma tale's ambiguities, the Pentecostal evangelists proved themselves capable of seeing things the way I knew their congregants and hoped-for converts do. They were tapping into the distinctly, but not uniquely, Makhuwa tradition of convertibility, making what seemed to me the very moves required of Pentecostalism if it is to save itself in northern Mozambique.

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